

Council cottages and community in inter-war Britain: a study of class, culture, politics and place.

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**COUNCIL COTTAGES AND COMMUNITY
IN INTER-WAR BRITAIN:
A STUDY OF CLASS, CULTURE, POLITICS AND PLACE**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis makes a contribution to the debates surrounding the idea of community on the cottage council estates of inter-war Britain. It questions the conventional wisdom that community was lacking upon these estates. Recognising the problematic nature of the notion of community, this thesis overcomes the confusion inherent in the term when it is used to describe social structures by viewing community instead as a structure of meaning, as a discursive rather than material reality. This guides my examination of community on the estates. Rather than there being *no* community, it is argued that there were at least three different discourses of community, and what is important is the relationships between them. Chapter One discusses the contexts in which these estates were built, and then sets out the ways in which community is understood in this thesis. Chapter Two explains the methodology that was used, a combination of archival and oral history. In Chapter Three Roehampton and Watling - the two estates this research focuses upon - are described in order to provide the contextual setting for my interpretation of the discourses of community that were present there. Chapter Four is concerned with community from the viewpoint of the residents who lived on the estates. Chapter Five considers discourses of community from the point of view of the tenants' and residents' associations that developed upon Roehampton and Watling. Chapter Six explores the discourse of community that was promoted on the estates by the Community Association movement.

Overall the thesis argues that the discourses of community on inter-war housing estates have to be understood in terms of the occupational structures, cultures and politics of these estates.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.A.R.S.	British Association of Residential Settlements
C.H.A.C.	Central Housing Advisory Committee
E.S.A.	Educational Settlements Association
G.L.R.O.	Greater London Record Office
H.U.D.C.	Hendon Urban District Council
L.C.C.	London County Council
L.C.S.S.	London Council of Social Service
N.C.S.S.	National Council of Social Service
N.E.C.C.	New Estates Community Committee
O.C.A.	Old Comrades' Association
P.E.P.	Political and Economic Planning
P.R.O.	Public Record Office
P.R.O.P.	Putney and Roehampton Organisation of Pensioners
R.E.T.A.	Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association
T.D.L.	Watling Tenants' Defence League
W.A.	Watling Association
W.H.S.	Watling Horticultural Society
W.R.A.	Watling Residents' Association

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION: COTTAGE ESTATES AND COMMUNITY.

A. Introduction.

This thesis undertakes an investigation of the development of social life upon the suburban cottage council estates built in England between the two World Wars. It does so principally through an examination of differing discourses of community that were of relevance to the estates. This topic of council cottages and community is chosen for two reasons. First, there is the unique nature of the estates and the comparisons and distinctions which can be drawn between them and the new lifestyles also being created in the private suburbs around them. Second, there is the prevalence of notions of community within the estates' ideological origins, physical planning, everyday life, contemporary sociological analysis and subsequent historical review. To justify and further define this area of study five general themes are reviewed in the following pages.

The chapter begins by tracing the origins of municipal housing and detailing how the ideological motives behind the development of council estates at the close of World War I had major implications for both the form the estates took and the expectations of a new way of life for those who came to live in them. Largely influenced in their design by fears surrounding the physical, social and moral problems attendant upon the industrialisation and urbanisation of the once green and pleasant land of England, the estates were intended to reproduce an image of rural England from time immemorial. This was an England of villages, morality and community. The intended new way of life was not wholly original, I argue, but rather a return to a romanticised life of "olde Englande."

The second section of the chapter turns to an assessment of how the new way of life developed. To contextualise life on the cottage council estates the surrounding private suburbs are first briefly discussed. A culture of privacy, the central aspect of many views of suburbia, is emphasised. Doing so, however, is to risk portraying the suburbs and their typically middle-class residents in a somewhat

monolithic and negative light. Some of the less frequently cited facets of suburban life are also drawn out. The focus then returns to life on the council estates. The impact of this form of housing on the lives of the people who came to live in it has, I will argue, been broadly neglected. Only broadly neglected, however, for many have berated the lack of community on these estates. Yet a central feature of the argument presented here is that the generalization that the new cottage council estates lacked community is problematic. This provides the basis for the thesis.

However, any use of the term 'community', with its innumerable definitions and meanings, is problematic. This issue forms the focus of the third section of this chapter where the nature and use of the term 'community' is explored. The confused conceptualizations which surround it are noted, but calls for its abandonment are rejected. The emotive power inherent in 'community' ensures, I suggest, that it remains an appealing and enduring ideal; an ideal which has been used to engender support for, and to legitimize, various activities and particular ways of life. However, in contrast to the traditional community study, it is proposed that community should be viewed not as a social structure or material reality, but - in a manner similar to Raymond Williams's 'structures of feeling' - as a structure of meaning or, taking a further step, a discursive structure. Such a suggestion, however, must recognise that conceptual confusion is not restricted solely to 'community', but also closely surrounds the term 'discourse'. There is a considerable literature which debates this idea. The third section concludes, therefore, by engaging with this wider literature and clarifying the use of the term 'discourse' as it is presented in this thesis.

In the fourth section of the chapter I turn to the work of Eileen and Stephen Yeo and their discussion of various meanings imputed to community. In their chapter 'On the Uses of "Community"' they describe a 'middle-class' discourse of community, which they term 'community as service'. This was developed by mid-nineteenth-century civic leaders in order to displace working-class activities that they viewed as militant and threatening to the established social order. In the twentieth century this discourse, the Yeos tell us, was once again visible in the Community Association movement, a movement which was also concerned to displace working-

class activity. This time, however, it was working-class activity on the new inter-war cottage council estates - often in the form of estate tenants' or residents' associations - which, again according to the Yeos, had arisen as part of the wider militancy of the 1920s. Community Associations, the Yeos argue, were formed on the new estates in reaction to these tenants' organisations and aimed to merge with them so as to lessen their implicitly militant, working-class agitations.¹

There are, however, two particular shortcomings within the Yeos' discussion. These are set out in the final section of this chapter. First, I argue that having identified and elaborated on the discourse of 'community as service', the Yeos fail to repeat this for discourses of community provided by the estate residents and by their organisations - the estate tenants' or residents' associations. What these discourses were and how they differed from the 'community as service' discourse is not made clear. Second, I suggest that the limited information the Yeos do give is inaccurate and misleading in portraying the residents of the cottage estates and their associations, and hence their discourses of community, as simply working-class. Not only were there middle-class residents on the estates too, but I argue that the Yeos' wider view of class is too generalised. Class formation, I suggest, needs to be viewed in its local context. Michael Savage, for instance, points out that the working class should not be depicted as a homogenous group of people, but one that is differentiated according to specific local social relations - circumstances of occupational structure, gender relations and neighbourhood structure. Class, he suggests, is place-specific.² All the more so, I argue, for class is also mediated at the local level through politics and culture.

In conclusion, I draw these themes together to move from the broad aim of problematizing the generalization that the cottage council estates lacked community to the more specific focus of investigating the particular discourses of community associated with the estates. This means specifying the three discourses which are examined in this thesis: the discourse of community from the viewpoint of the estate

¹ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community": from Owenism to the Present' in S. Yeo (Ed.), *New Views of Co-operation* (London, 1988), 229-58.

² M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987).

residents; the discourse of community of the estates' tenants' and residents' associations; and the discourse of community of the Community Association movement. The first two discourses have been neglected and generalised in previous work, while that of the Community Association movement needs to be reassessed, I argue, in view of the generalised and misleading depiction of the context in which it arose. These discourses of community and the differences between them need to be grounded in the histories and geographies of the estates in a firmer and clearer fashion than has previously been the case. First, then, the building of the estates.

B. Council Cottages In Garden Suburbs.

More than four million houses were built in England and Wales in the inter-war years, and over one million of these were council houses. This was the first major programme of Exchequer subsidised housing provision since the years preceding 1914 had seen the building of just 24,000 municipal dwellings.³ Burnett comments that:

“The involvement of the local authorities in the provision of accommodation, which began importantly in 1919, constituted a minor revolution in the standards of working class housing and living. By generally adopting the principle of cottage estates in garden suburbs it involved the dispersal of hundreds of thousands of people from crowded inner city areas to new residential districts on the outskirts. ... A new pattern of life was thereby created for millions of people.”⁴

This section aims to contextualize the thinking behind the new pattern of life intended for the garden suburb cottage estates. Drawing on the work of Mark Swenarton, the adoption of garden suburb design as the basis for the post-war housing programme is explained. Fears of social unrest, it is argued, prompted the provision of housing built to the high standards encapsulated within the Garden City model for development. It is emphasised, however, that the Garden City had distinctive ideological origins way beyond a raising of house standards. Such

³ S. Merrett, *State Housing in Britain* (London, 1979), 26.

⁴ J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1970* (London, 1980), 230-1.

development represented a rejection of much that characterised modern urban industrial England. The improved physical environment aimed to raise levels of health and morality that it was believed industrialisation had eroded. The modelling of the environment upon pre-industrial village life represented a nostalgic and romanticised yearning for the deferential social relations of mediaeval England. The essence of the Garden City ideal was a picture of morality, stability, harmony and community.

(i) Homes Fit For Heroes.

The events leading to the first programme of council house building at the end of World War I are widely recognised. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the early years of the twentieth century the private housing market, government intervention, and various philanthropic groups all failed in both qualitative and quantitative terms to provide decent and affordable homes for large parts of the working class. The result was that many were forced to live in inadequate dwellings that were referred to then and now as ‘slums’.

“These were ill-lit, poorly ventilated, often without means of heating, bare of facilities such as water closets and sinks, with leaking roofs and bulging walls. Above all, they were overcrowded. ... Cellars, back-to-backs, huddled courts and, towards the end of the century, soaring tenement blocks were the devices of design for increasing the number of rooms per acre. ... Thus developed the stinking labyrinths of our great cities with their narrow streets, their courts heaped with human excreta and rubbish, their decrepit buildings groaning with humanity.”⁵

World War I acted to exacerbate the problem. There was no maintenance, repair nor building of houses during the years of conflict. By the time of the Armistice, therefore, the housing problem was severe.

“Many of the heroes of the trenches returned to housing conditions worse than those which they had left and were forced to share accommodation with relatives, to occupy one or two rooms in tenemented houses or inhabit a variety of ‘temporary dwellings’ which included wooden shacks, caravans and railway carriages often totally without sanitary arrangements.”⁶

⁵ S. Merrett, *State Housing in Britain*, 4-5.

⁶ J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970*, 217.

The introduction of rent control in 1915 coupled with the temporary high cost of materials and labour at the end of the War meant that it was no longer profitable for private enterprise to build houses.⁷ If the situation was to be ameliorated the government needed to intervene.

However, a further point emphasised by Mark Swenarton is that intervention was assured because of the widespread fears of social unrest and revolution that existed in the immediate aftermath of the war. Memories were still fresh of the success of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, and concerns for the social order were not eased by the thirty-five million work-days lost in strikes in 1919. Housing conditions in particular were a source of disenchantment for the returning heroes.⁸ The post-war housing programme, according to Swenarton, was a response to this. It was a way of demonstrating to the working class that their aspirations would be met under the existing order – that standards of living would be far superior in the future. Revolution would be shown to be unnecessary.⁹ As Lloyd George commented of his ‘Homes fit for Heroes’ campaign:

“‘Britain would hold out against the danger of Bolshevism, but only if the people were given confidence - only if they were made to believe that things were being done for them.’”¹⁰

The post-war housing programme was not simply concerned to ease the housing crisis. It was also a “device to legitimize the existing organisation of society.”¹¹ This recognition of the ideological effects of house provision had important implications for the type of houses to be built.¹² It was crucial to the aims of the government that the housing programme point the way to a better future for the working class. As J. D. Gilbert, M.P. for Southwark, explained the new houses

⁷ M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants* (Leicester, 1984), 9; and A.E. Holmans, *Housing Policy in Britain*, 85-6.

⁸ See S. Merrett, *State Housing in Britain*, 32.

⁹ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 86.

¹⁰ Quoted in A.E. Holmans, *Housing Policy in Britain*, 298.

¹¹ M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, 10.

¹² See M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 86.

had to be, and had to be seen to be, “on quite different lines” from previous ones “and a great improvement on anything we have.”¹³

The radical changes in quality required to do this were embodied within the 1918 Tudor Walters Report which set out the recommendations of a committee set up in 1917 to “consider questions of building construction ... of dwellings for the working classes.”¹⁴ Reflecting the influence of Raymond Unwin, a Committee member and leading architect and exponent of the Garden City movement, this advocated the principles and techniques of Garden City layout and urged higher standards in various aspects of new housing for the working class. Each house, or ‘cottage’ as they were called in the Report, should have a minimum of three rooms on the ground floor (the living room, parlour, and scullery) and three bedrooms above. A larder and bathroom were also prerequisites. Deep, narrow-fronted “by-law houses” were to be avoided for their inevitable rear projections which reduced light and air to the back of the house. Wider frontages were preferred and ideally the living room stretched from the front to the back of the house.¹⁵ Development was to be at a very low density. Each house would have its own garden and there would be plenty of open and green spaces. The need for low density meant that suburban development was expected because it was there that land would be both available and cheap.¹⁶

In the midst of social unrest and industrial dislocation the Tudor Walters Report had an obvious appeal and appeared to hold the solution:-

“The new houses built by the state - each with its own garden, surrounded by trees and hedges, and equipped internally with the amenities of a middle-class home - would provide visible proof of the irrelevance of revolution.”¹⁷

The Report was, therefore, wholly adopted as the basis of the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act. This provided the first Exchequer subsidy towards the

¹³ Quoted in M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 86.

¹⁴ See Local Government Board, *Report of the Committee appointed ... to consider questions of building construction in connection with the provision of dwellings for the working classes, etc*, quoted in M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*.

¹⁵ See J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970*, 219-20.

¹⁶ See M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 96-7.

¹⁷ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 86.

provision of housing. Suburban cottage council estates soon began to develop.

Typical of many other writers, Mowat provides the following generalisation:

“They were bright, if also somewhat bleak in appearance (for trees, if planted, grew slowly). The houses, in blocks of two or four, of two storeys and built in brick or stucco, were set back from curving streets or circles and each had its long garden strip. A shopping centre grew by degrees, perhaps round a central green, where a new church, a cinema, a public house might also be built. The shops were often small and chilly, with severe plate glass windows and signs in stiff white letters on a black glass ground. The public house was large and well-appointed, but did not invite conviviality.”¹⁸

Although there were subsequently a variety of Acts and changes in policy, this was the style of housing that remained the standard for council estates throughout the inter-war years and longer.¹⁹

(ii) The Country Is England.

Although the government's adoption of the Garden City ideal as the model for council housing was an *ad hoc* response to the social problems Britain faced at the close of World War I, it was an ideal that had been formulated and promoted as an alternative to urban squalor since the nineteenth century. Throughout this time it had acquired significant ideological overtones.²⁰ My purpose here is to highlight those overtones. Ebenezer Howard's Garden City, I stress, was an ideal concerned not just to ameliorate poor sanitary conditions attendant upon the urbanisation and industrialisation of England's green and pleasant land. Howard was not just a physical planner for he aimed to nurture “a new hope, a new life, a new civilisation.”²¹ Central to his thinking was the relationship of city plan to moral reform.²² In one respect, the Garden City promotion of healthy environments and activities was encouraged by the belief that the physical and moral degeneracy of many urban residents could be improved by returning them to the land. The placing of these healthy minds amongst picturesque cottages and streets, gardens and greens

¹⁸ C. L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940* (London, 1955), 229.

¹⁹ J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970*, 218.

²⁰ W. Peterson, 'The Ideological Origins of Britain's New Towns', *American Institute of Planners Journal* XXXIV (May 1968), 160-70.

²¹ E. Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (London, 1960), 6.

²² R. T. Legates & F. Stout (Eds), *The City Reader* (London, 1996), 335.

had a further purpose however. It was an attempt to recreate the Victorian middle classes' image of an England of idealised social relationships. This was an England pre-dating the industrial revolution, an England from time immemorial. This was a romanticised England of villages, where the village way of life was characterised by images of stability, harmony, community and, again, morality.

It is an undeniable aspect of the Garden City ideal that the healthy environment offered by the proposed 'marriage' of town and country was seen as a solution to the physical misery of the slums. Having said this, however, the ideology of the Garden City extends deeper than the mere physical and aesthetic qualities of green fields in contrast to city streets. Howard's new civilisation was grounded in visions of the past. It reflected a nostalgic yearning for the life of pre-industrial England. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this had become established as a golden era to which it was desirable to return. A whole host of intellectuals, writers, poets and artists of this time also persuasively depicted it as England's natural state. Amongst those chiefly responsible were Cobbett, Coleridge, Carlyle, Kingsley, Engels and Ruskin.²³ So culturally ingrained has the image become that Ruth Glass summarised it as:

"A lengthy, thorough course of indoctrination, to which all of us, everywhere, have at some time or other been subjected."²⁴

Central to this ideology of England and Englishness that permeated the Garden City ideal was the theme of rurality.

Visions of rural England appealed to the imagination of the Victorian middle classes by virtue of the contrast they presented with the unwanted and threatening by-products of the industrial revolution. Whereas England's towns and cities were associated with destitution, squalor, materialism, prostitution, crime and class

²³ L. Davidoff, J. L'Esperance & H. Newby, 'Landscape with Figures: Home and Community in English Society', in J. Mitchell & A. Oakley (Eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth, 1979), 150.

²⁴ R. Glass, 'Conflict in Cities', in CIBA Foundation Symposium, *Conflict in Society* (London, 1966), 142.

conflict, rural areas were identified with purity, decency, goodness and honesty.²⁵ In rural England men and women, it was thought, still lived naturally.

“The air is clean, personal relationships matter ..., there is no crime ... and no violence ... It is an organic society.”²⁶

In contrast, the problems of the cities were perceived as the by-products of an unnatural way of life.

“Such is the superiority of rural occupations and pleasures, that commerce, large societies or crowded cities may justly be reckoned as unnatural.”²⁷

So unnatural was modern urban living that the squalor and other evils associated with it were seen as a reflection of the degeneration of the English race.

“The city breeds one stamp of human beings and the country breeds another. ... Take the people away from their natural breeding grounds, thereby sapping their health and strength in cities such as nature never intended to be the permanent home of men [*sic*], and the decay of this country becomes only a matter of time.”²⁸

If the nation was to survive, therefore, the population had to be returned to rural areas. The slum dweller, emancipated from the physical degradation of overcrowded living and exposed to light and air, would find that:

“His [*sic*] feelings are elevated, his health improves, his whole nature expands, and then, if there be the seeds of goodness in him, they swell, burst, grow, flower and bear fruit.”²⁹

Mind, body and spirit were held to be interdependent.³⁰

To derive the greatest benefit from a return to nature (and to reinforce the non-urbanity of the countryside), activities that were rural, natural and healthy were similarly privileged within this vision of England. Compared to drinking and gambling, contemporaries believed folk music could have wondrous effects.

²⁵ L. Davidoff, J. L'Esperance & H. Newby, 'Landscape with Figures', 144-5; & A. Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', in R. Colls & P. Dodd (Eds), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London, 1986), 63.

²⁶ A. Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', 63.

²⁷ R. Glass, 'Conflict in Cities', 142.

²⁸ H. Rider Haggard, *A Farmer's Year* (London, 1899), 466.

²⁹ G. Bell, *Day and Night in the Wynds of Edinburgh and Blackfriars Wynd Analysed 1849-50* (reprinted Wakefield, 1983).

³⁰ D. Matless, 'The Art of Right Living: landscape and citizenship, 1918-39', in S. Pile & N. Thrift (Eds), *Mapping The Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation* (London, 1995), 107.

“The revival of our English folk music is ... part of a great national revival, a going back from the town to the country, a reaction against all that is demoralising in city life. It is a re-awakening of that part of our national consciousness which makes for wholeness, saneness and healthy merriment.”³¹

Gardening, a literal return to the land, was another much recommended pursuit. It crystallised the commonplace life of the past and provided the gardeners with their means of subsistence. They would, therefore, be absorbed contentedly in their work, untroubled by great ideas or affairs of the world.³² By virtue of its closeness to nature it was also the key to the maintenance of a healthy, vigorous and moral race.

“Of all forms of productive capacity there is none more vital, indispensable and steadying than the application of human industry to the cultivation of the soil.”³³

As Matless’s work shows, the preoccupation with ‘healthy’ forms of recreation persisted well into the inter-war period. Then too “open-air leisure was a part of England advancing morally, spiritually and physically.”³⁴ The quest for a healthy body and healthy mind liberated from the degeneracy of urban industrial England with its soul destroying cinemas and pubs manifested itself in the promotion of activities such as gymnastics, rambling and hiking. These are issues returned to in Chapter Six.

The importance of rurality to the vision of England encapsulated within the Garden City, however, was more than just the physical and moral benefits to be derived from the provision of healthy environments and pastimes within a rural setting. The theme of rurality also reflected notions of the kind of society into which individuals were intended to fit.

“Life in the countryside was viewed as one of harmony and virtue, as static and settled. It consisted in Gray’s words of ‘peace, rusticity and happy poverty’.”³⁵

³¹ M. Neal, *The Esperance Morris Book* (London, 1910), 2. Quoted in V. Gammon, ‘Folk Song Collecting in Sussex and Surrey, 1843-1914,’ *History Workshop Journal* (10) (Autumn 1980), 81.

³² A. Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty: Richard Payne Knight and the Picturesque* (Cambridge, 1997), 283-4.

³³ C. Turner, *Land Problems and National Welfare* (London, 1911), vi-viii.

³⁴ D. Matless, ‘The Art of Right Living’, 96.

³⁵ L. Davidoff, J. L’Esperance & H. Newby, ‘Landscape with Figures’, 149.

These visions of Englishness had specific political shapes and central to them were sentiments of continuity, harmony and above all classlessness.³⁶ The idealised setting for these sentiments were images of the English village and its cottages. Interconnecting with the theme of rurality, these images were also central components of the Garden City ideal.

To those disillusioned with urban life the village was “a culturally charged object; charged with powers, knowledges, memories, politics, moralities and more.”³⁷ In one sense, responding to the need to impose order upon the increasingly troublesome, impersonal and alienating society of industrialised England, the village provided a “cognitive and moral map of the universe.”³⁸ It represented tradition. Whilst industrial capitalism had undermined previous economic and social structures and the associated deferential social relations, the village represented the small territorial units upon which deference to traditional authority depended.³⁹ The village was where the good squire had presided over the honest and sturdy peasantry. It was the image of “simultaneous social hierarchy and harmony, continuous down the ages and through the industrial revolution.”⁴⁰

The cottage was the necessary infrastructure to approximate the rural idyll and village image.⁴¹ As Ford puts it, the daydreaming Victorian imagined “a scattered group of thatched-roof cottages, with lattice windows and winding paths lined with hollyhocks and roses.”⁴² William Cobbett’s description in *Rural Rides* of the pleasure he experienced viewing cottages on his journeys is not atypical. Never did he see “one miserable hovel in which a labourer resided.” Rather he saw “walks and flower borders, and the honey-suckles, and roses, trained over doors, or over

³⁶ A. Howkins, ‘The Discovery of Rural England’, 75.

³⁷ D. Matless, ‘Doing the English Village, 1945-90: An Essay in Imaginative Geography’, in P. J. Cloke, M. Doel, D. Matless, M. Phillips & N. Thrift (Eds), *Writing the Rural: Five Cultural Geographies* (London, 1994), 84.

³⁸ L. Davidoff, J. L’Esperance & H. Newby, ‘Landscape with Figures’, 143.

³⁹ L. Davidoff, J. L’Esperance & H. Newby, ‘Landscape with Figures’, 140-3; H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (London, 1969), 51.

⁴⁰ D. Matless, ‘Doing the English Village, 1945-90’, 75.

⁴¹ L. Davidoff, J. L’Esperance & H. Newby, ‘Landscape with Figures’, 144-5.

⁴² G. H. Ford, ‘Felicitous Space: The Cottage Controversy’, in U. C. Knoepfelmacher & G. B. Tennyson (Eds), *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (London, 1977), 29.

arched sticks.”⁴³ The appeal of the village and its cottages again lay in their non-urbanity. Such images represented the antithesis of urban industrial England. Here was the image of pastoral England, the organic society shattered by industrialism. The visions of village and cottage were “infused with a domestic glow suggestive of an earlier and better world of decency and honesty.”⁴⁴

In 1829, for instance, the poet laureate Robert Southey lamented the contrast between new houses for the industrial workforce and traditional farm labourers’ cottages. He invoked first the image of harmony and idealised social relations between classes - “the old cottages are such as the poet and the painter equally delight in holding.” He continued:

“Substantially built of the native stone ... the materials could not have adjusted themselves more beautifully in accord with the surrounding scene; and time has still further harmonised them with weather stains, lichens and moss. ... The new cottages of the manufacturers are upon the manufacturing pattern – naked, and in a row. ... Time will not mellow them; nature will neither clothe nor conceal them; and they will remain always as offensive to the eye as to the mind.”⁴⁵

The scale of the cottage was also more in tune with nature. Whereas urban development was typified by architecture dominating nature, cottages were seen as growing out of the ground. They were neither disproportionately large nor were they unnaturally imposed upon the landscape.⁴⁶ Cottages were free from the taint of industrialism.

This was the case in other ways too. Cottages were linked to morality. For instance, Tennyson associated the cottage with purity and innocence. Charlotte Brontë’s novels make the assumption that “virtue grew under a thatch roof and vice under a tile roof.” John Ruskin’s works associate cottages with running water – an image of purification.⁴⁷ Doubtless this was helped by the moral uplift effected

⁴³ W. Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (Harmondsworth, 1967), 556-66.

⁴⁴ A. Howkins, ‘The Discovery of Rural England’, 73.

⁴⁵ R. Southey, *Colloquies* (London, 1829), I: 173-4.

⁴⁶ W. L. Crease, ‘Imagination in the Suburb’ in U. C. Knoepfelmacher & G. B. Tennyson (Eds), *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, 67.

⁴⁷ G. H. Ford, ‘Felicitous Space’, 41-4.

through tending for the gardens. As Southey further noted of the farm labourers' cottages in comparison to the houses of the industrial workers:

"The rose bushes round the door ... the tall hollyhocks in front ... the beehives, and the orchard ... indicate in the owners some portion of ease and leisure some sense of innocent and healthful enjoyment."⁴⁸

This image of England was also the form of community which the Victorian upper and middle class wished to preserve, or, where it had been disrupted by the intrusion of industrial and urban growth, recreate.

"During the nineteenth century it was taken for granted that real communities could only be found in the English countryside. It was in rural England that the sense of community reigned and where the apparently automatic acceptance of the 'natural order' of things ensured that the norms of deference and paternalism remained at their strongest. ... community was *par excellence* a rural phenomenon, where the Good Life prevailed amid the placid and the harmonious."⁴⁹

This was especially the case in the work of Raymond Unwin who, like Howard, placed an emphasis upon physical planning and design as vehicles for unifying and modifying society.⁵⁰ For Unwin, the village was an organic embodiment of the small, personally related community and it was necessary that the site planner should concentrate on the "creation of a village community."⁵¹ Unwin's ideal was:

"An orderly community of people, having intimate relations one with the other, which undoubtedly is given in old English villages, and which has been the cause of much of the beauty which we find there."⁵²

The image, however, was also one that was romanticised. As noted above, the reality of the traditional village was that it was characterised by deferential rather than egalitarian social relations. Nostalgia for the cottage was also often unjustified. For instance, a common practice in the mid-nineteenth century was subletting. The original tenant family would live in one room, typically the kitchen, single men in the others.⁵³ Dickens attributed crime and violence in villages to such

⁴⁸ R. Southey, *Colloquies*, 173-4.

⁴⁹ L. Davidoff, J. L'Esperance & H. Newby, 'Landscape with Figures', 146-7. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁰ R. T. Legates & F. Stout (Eds), *The City Reader*, 355.

⁵¹ R. Unwin, *Town Planning in Practice* (New York, 1971), 379.

⁵² R. Unwin, *Town Planning in Practice*, 381-2.

⁵³ R. Southey, *Colloquies*, 173-4.

overcrowding. In contrast to Brontë, Cobbett and Tennyson, he also believed it contributed to rural residents' lack of morality.

“Into the secrets of cottage life, where there is no possibility of decent and natural separation. ... It is enough to say that the domestic virtues arising out of them are often too repellent to every human virtue. ... How long have we heard ... of huts where the families of British labourers are so huddled together, that from childhood they become inured to what would shock the South Sea savages.”⁵⁴

As Howkins notes of rural England in general:

“The contemporary or the historian does not need to scratch very deeply to find another side – the dark side of village life which threatened consensus and stability not perhaps with revolution but with constant problems and the ever present possibility of social disorder.”⁵⁵

What the Garden City ideal proposed therefore was a blurring of the aesthetic and the social. As Davidoff *et al.* put it:

“Because it was assumed that the village or the home could be aesthetically pleasing, it was assumed that they contained an equally highly valued social existence.”⁵⁶

The overall vision behind the Garden City, then, was of a return to life characterised by harmony, stability, contentment, purity, and community. It was the antithesis of the image of the industrial city. It was believed that “the town had ‘failed’ and that only in the countryside were truth and beauty and ‘real Englishness’ to be found.”⁵⁷ To the Victorian middle classes the land and the country represented:

“Order, stability and naturalness. In contrast to the towns, and London in particular, the country and country people were seen as the essence of England, uncontaminated by racial degeneration and the false values of cosmopolitan urban life.”⁵⁸

Mind, body and soul were believed to be interdependent and a moral discourse of health and vigour was located in rural England. Proximity to nature was beneficial, it was a setting that was good for the English population both morally and

⁵⁴ C. Dickens, *Uncollected Writings from Household Words* (Bloomington, 1968), I: 282-3.

⁵⁵ A. Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History 1850-1925* (London, 1991), 87.

⁵⁶ L. Davidoff, J. L'Esperance & H. Newby, ‘Landscape with Figures’, 145.

⁵⁷ A. Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 4.

⁵⁸ A. Howkins, ‘The Discovery of Rural England’, 69.

physically, it was the place to rebuild both a body and a self.⁵⁹ The setting within the countryside which provided the model of development was the village community. On the side of tradition rather than modernity, this was “the proper place for the proper Englishman to dwell.”⁶⁰ Compared with the discord of the city images of the village, and its cottages, offered an example of an ordered life of stability, gentility, morality and harmony, both social and scenic. The meaning of the village was that of a particular form of social relations, that of community.⁶¹

It was these ideals that were at the heart of Howard’s visions of a new civilisation. Their influence has been far-reaching and they were very much alive in crucial quarters for planning in the inter-war period. Unwin shared them, and following his recommendation the post-war government implemented them in the building of the cottage council estates. The next section discusses the ways in which the new civilisation panned out.

C. Visions Of Suburbia.

Inspired by the ideals of the Garden City, the cottage council estates embodied notions and hopes of a new way of life. The purpose of this section is to examine the forms this way of life is traditionally thought to have taken. Despite the unique nature of the council estates, I begin by briefly assessing the lifestyles also being created upon the private suburban estates that surrounded them. It is inevitable that comparisons and distinctions should be drawn between the two. Life in the predominantly middle-class private suburbs, I argue, is often viewed as synonymous with a culture of privacy with the residents adopting an inward focus upon the family and the home – an evangelical domesticity. Although this was undoubtedly commonplace, such a portrayal is unduly monolithic, incomplete and

⁵⁹ D. Matless, ‘Doing the English Village, 1945-90’, 81; & P. Bishop, *Consuming Constable: Diet, Utopian Landscape and National Identity* Working Paper 5, Department of Geography, University of Nottingham (1990).

⁶⁰ P. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London, 1965), 25.

⁶¹ D. Matless, ‘Doing the English Village, 1945-90’, 76-7; & S. Harper, ‘The British Rural Community: An Overview of Perspectives’, *Journal of Rural Studies* 5 (2) (1989), 161-84.

generally negative. It is emphasised, therefore, that there are also other, and at times more positive, aspects to be considered. I then return to the council estates. It is noted first that, overall, there is a lack of academic writing concerned with the development of social life upon them. The sole exception to this is in terms of the notion of community. Contemporary writers to present day theorists have all argued that the estates lacked community. It is a central aim of this thesis to problematise that assertion.

(i) *Home Sweet Home.*

“He felt that to be suburban was almost a calling in itself, involving steadiness, a certain humility in the face of temptation, social or otherwise, and a loving, almost painful attachment to home. The stamp of a suburban childhood, he reflected, probably marked one for life. ... There was for him a sweetness in the absence of excitement that such a condition implied, or perhaps imposed.”⁶²

Suburbia, Roger Silverstone tells us, stems from the attempt to “create for middle classes middle cultures in middle spaces.” Yet these middle cultures of the middle classes are difficult to identify. Although suburbia is instantly recognisable it is never entirely familiar, nor singular or unchanging.⁶³ A central feature of many accounts of suburban culture, however, is an emphasis upon domestic privacy. Suburbia is a “collective effort to live a private life.”⁶⁴ This section first considers the importance accorded to privacy in the suburbs and then suggests that there are other aspects of suburban culture that also need to be recognised.

The origins of the middle-class ethos of suburban privacy have traditionally been located in the eighteenth-century emergence of a new form of family – closed, domestic and nuclear - within the London bourgeoisie who invented suburbia. This was a form of family that was inner-directed, united by strong and exclusive personal ties, and characterised by an emphasis on the boundary surrounding the nuclear

⁶² A. Brookner, *Lewis Percy* (London, 1989), 214.

⁶³ R. Silverstone, ‘Introduction’, in R. Silverstone (Ed), *Visions of Suburbia* (London, 1997), 4.

⁶⁴ L. Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (London, 1940), 215.

unit.⁶⁵ Suburbia arose, Fishman tells us, because such an emphasis did not correspond with the realities of the traditional urban form. Even the wealthiest merchants' homes were open to the city and the merchants' employees. They provided little privacy for the emergence of any closed sphere of emotional intimacy. Further, the amusements and attractions of the city threatened to draw the family away from its domesticated attachments. There was a contradiction between the city and the new family. Suburbia began to develop as such families sought to separate themselves from the intrusions of the workplace and the city. Only in a suburban environment could the family be "the primary and overwhelming emotional focus of its members' lives."⁶⁶ As Raymond Williams puts it, there was a "suburban separation of 'work' and 'life'."⁶⁷

This was encouraged by the strength of the Evangelical movement among the upper middle class of London in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Promoting a new ideal of conduct centred upon the role of the family, the Evangelicals were "the ideologists of the closed, domesticated nuclear family."

"The Evangelicals taught that the most secure path to salvation was the beneficent influence of a truly Christian family. Anything that strengthened the emotional ties within the family was therefore holy; anything that weakened the family and its ability to foster true morality was anathema."⁶⁸

Women were accorded a notably prominent role, ensuring that the domesticity of the suburbs was a feminised domesticity. They were the principal guardians of the Christian home, to which they were required to be fully committed. Any role for women outside the domestic sphere exposed them unnecessarily to the evils of the city. To those most profoundly affected by Evangelical domesticism, therefore, the city was not simply an improper setting for closed family life, it was immoral. In addition to their crowded and undeniably dirty and unhealthy nature the cities had greater problems therefore. Salvation itself was dependent upon the separation of the sacred female world of the family and home from the metropolis. Although the

⁶⁵ R. Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York, 1987). See L.J. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York, 1977), part 4.

⁶⁶ R. Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 9, 33-5.

⁶⁷ R. Williams, *Culture and Society* (Harmondsworth, 1961), 211.

foundation of bourgeois suburban life was the primacy of family life suburban development again needs to be defined in relation to its rejected opposite: the inhumane and immoral metropolis. In common with the ideals of a life in union with nature evoked by the Garden City movement, buried deep within visions of the suburban dream is a nightmare image of eighteenth-century London.⁶⁹

The origins of bourgeois suburbia and its ethos of privacy, respectability and morality rested in the emergence of the modern nuclear family separated from the intrusions of the workplace and attractions of the city, freed from its corruption and restored to harmony with nature.⁷⁰ However, the importance accorded to family life and privacy was a sentiment not restricted to solely the suburban lives of the bourgeois elite. It became more widespread as suburban development for other elements of the middle class continued apace in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thompson, for instance, tells us that since the nineteenth century the members of the lower middle class had adopted the cult of the genteel as a method of distancing themselves from the working classes. Such a lifestyle had many elements:

“Thrift, sobriety, abstemiousness, disapproval of frivolity, abhorrence of debt, suppression of sexuality, careful parading of attendance at church or chapel, and emphasis on keeping up appearances.”

Most distinctively, however, the lower middle class attempted to emphasise their middle-class stature by elevating “the practices of privacy and keeping oneself to oneself to the level of a doctrine.” They were “permeated with the introversion of family privacy” and were able to give the purest “performance of the nuclear family turned in on itself.”⁷¹

This importance attached to the family, home and privacy by lower middle-class residents of inter-war suburbia was also evidenced in other ways. It was apparent in the imagery of their homes and gardens. Externally, there was a

⁶⁸ R. Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 34-5.

⁶⁹ R. Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 27-38.

⁷⁰ R. Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, x.

⁷¹ F.M.L. Thompson, ‘Town and City’, in F.M.L. Thompson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Volume 1, Regions and Communities* (Cambridge, 1990), 63-71.

particular note of feminine domesticity surrounding the body image projected by the physiognomy of the suburban house. For instance, the swelling bosom of the bay windows and the front garden spread like an apron communicated maternal warmth and provided connotations of the mother as home-maker so important in the period. "The woman's place was not only in the home; the woman was the home."⁷² Internally, the home was clad with symbols that spoke of home, of family, of stability and of domesticity. For instance, Howard's garden cities had no monopoly on the imagery of the cottage. In the private suburbs of the inter-war years the cottage was a potent symbol of home and it figured prominently in ornaments and ephemera. Tea-cosies, calendars, biscuit tins, chocolate boxes and plaster wall plaques all depicted cottages. Boxes for letters and shoe brushes, teapots and marmalade jars were formed as cottages or bore pictures of them. Cottages and cottage gardens were embroidered on tray clothes or pieced together on jigsaw puzzles. As Oliver tells us, "images of the home and the values that were associated with it abounded."⁷³

It is not unusual, then, for the lives of the lower middle class in inter-war private suburbia to be viewed as centred on the family and the home.

"There was no doubt that these housing estates were pleasant places to live for those families whose chief ambition was to keep themselves to themselves, to avoid any pressures for an undue show of neighbourliness, and to conduct their social lives away from home territory, anonymously, and among networks which were not necessarily based upon residential propinquity."⁷⁴

Suburbia as such is widely viewed as socially sterile. It is the "place where society falls apart into atomized, individualist nuclear families."⁷⁵ This lifestyle and the suburbs in general have traditionally attracted few advocates.

"From the start suburbia attracted hostile comment from all the usual sources ... social theorists, cultural commentators, professional planners, architects,

⁷² P. Oliver, 'The Galleon on the Front Door: Imagery of the House and Garden', in P. Oliver, I. Davis & I. Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies* (London, 1994), 161.

⁷³ P. Oliver, 'A Lighthouse on the Mantelpiece: Symbolism in the Home', in P. Oliver, I. Davis & I. Bentley, *Dunroamin*, 187.

⁷⁴ F.M.L. Thompson, 'Town and City', 83.

⁷⁵ J. Hartley, 'The sexualization of suburbia: the diffusion of knowledge in the postmodern public sphere', in R. Silverstone (Ed), *Visions of Suburbia*, 185.

aesthetes, philosophers, environmentalists, economists – no one seems to have had a good word for suburbia.”⁷⁶

“Sociological literature is openly vituperative and pejorative in tone. It is a rare piece that finds some warmth and sincerity, or happiness in suburban life. The rest are dominated by judgements of unrelieved damnation. The suburbanite is doomed to remain imprisoned in his [*sic*] box house and in the conforming mould set by his [*sic*] neighbour.”⁷⁷

An early exception to the criticism was *The Castles on the Ground*.⁷⁸ This, however, was a book scorned by contemporaries as either an “irrelevant eccentricity or a betrayal of the forward-looking ideals of the Modern Movement.”⁷⁹

“Intellectuals and architects combined an aesthetic snobbism, self-interest, and a lack of understanding of popular aspirations in a many-sided attack on the popular suburb in the interwar [*sic*] years.”⁸⁰

However, recent commentators have questioned such a view of the centrality accorded to the Modernist evaluation of life in the private suburbs of the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, Cross argues that the cult of respectability was more than mere emulation by the lower middle classes. The emphasis on domesticity was also more than a materialist substitute for ‘real’ social relationships since “[b]oth were part of a strategy of self-definition and autonomy vis-à-vis a wider world of work.”⁸¹ At the very least, the depth of appreciation, if not accuracy, of the traditional accounts of suburban life is now being questioned.

“It seems likely that the vociferous critics ... had no personal experience of the suburbs, had not lived in them, and drew their conclusions from the railway carriage window on the way to their rural retreats.”⁸²

In one respect, life in the suburbs did not necessarily correspond with the images of anomie traditionally proposed. Oliver, for instance, describes the

⁷⁶ J. Hartley, ‘The sexualization of suburbia’, 184.

⁷⁷ T. Ktsanes & L. Reissman, ‘Suburbia: new homes for old values’, *Social Problems* vol.7 (1959-60), 187.

⁷⁸ J.M. Richards, *The Castles on the Ground* (London, 1946).

⁷⁹ J.M. Richards, *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella* (London, 1980), 188.

⁸⁰ G. Cross, ‘The suburban weekend: perspectives on a vanishing twentieth century dream’, in R. Silverstone (Ed), *Visions of Suburbia*, 110; J. Carey, *The Intellectuals and The Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London, 1992), 46-70.

⁸¹ G. Cross, ‘The suburban weekend’, 111.

⁸² P. Oliver, Introduction’, in P. Oliver, I. Davis & I. Bentley, *Dunroamin*, 25.

formation of strong social bonds between suburban settlers. On newly established estates it was especially important that relationships with other new residents were made. With no established structures for social intercourse, new ones were devised. Sports clubs would form and organise dances and other fundraising activities in addition to their sporting activities. There would also be camera clubs, amateur dramatic societies, and so forth. Although the appeal of the churches was diminishing many still had substantial congregations. Taking the dog for a walk offered further opportunity for developing social ties with other residents. People would meet their neighbours, welding important social links in conversations over garden fences and hedges. Common interest in the education of their children brought parents together to discuss the merits of local schools. Although the home was important for providing privacy and fulfilment, it did so without necessarily isolating its occupants from their neighbours. The residents of suburbia then were not “lonely people in a lonely crowd; anomie was not the characteristic mental state of the new migrant to the suburb.”⁸³

Doubts have also been raised over the repeated criticism of the private suburbs as socially, architecturally and aesthetically dreary and monotonous.⁸⁴ It is assumed that suburbia was “a trap, offering nothing but drab conformism and frigid respectability.”⁸⁵ However, there were aspects of suburban lifestyles that contrasted sharply with the traditional images of staid, reserved, conservative and respectable middle-class identities. For instance, bungalows were a novel and notable feature of suburbia and were invested, King tells us, with a variety of social meanings and alternative lifestyles. The emergence of the bungalow introduced the middle class to a new moral geography with new social codes.

“As the rooms were all on one floor, there were no stairs to signal (for a bourgeois population) the conventional and proper distinction between night and day and the behaviour and activities appropriate to each: undressing and dressing, sleeping and being awake. The existence of bedrooms adjacent to

⁸³ I. Davis, ‘A Celebration of Ambiguity: The Synthesis of Contrasting Values’, in P. Oliver, I. Davis & I. Bentley, *Dunroamin*, 89; P. Oliver, ‘Great Expectations: Suburban Values and the Rôle of the Media’, in P. Oliver, I. Davis & I. Bentley, *Dunroamin*, 125-6.

⁸⁴ P. Oliver, ‘The Galleon on the Front Door’, 158.

⁸⁵ A. Medhurst, ‘Negotiating the gnome zone: versions of suburbia in British popular culture’, in R. Silverstone (Ed), *Visions of Suburbia*, 241.

the sitting room inflected the social and moral space between them and ... introduced a potentially dangerous overlap between formal and informal, proper and improper activities.”⁸⁶

As Hartley notes, such ‘improper’ activities were almost certainly very widespread in suburbia for “this is where homes are traditionally set up by couples at the start of their sexually active careers, where children are begotten, and where teenagers first learn about sex.”⁸⁷

In further contrast, Silverstone praises the creativity of the suburbs. The appearance of the houses and gardens should be viewed as expressions of personal taste and identity. Polished doorsteps, decorated paths, and weeded gardens were marks of distinction, marks which were reinforced within the house by individual nuances and idiosyncrasies of decoration and material culture. Not every household had the same cottage design on their teapot.

“Spaces, both inside and outside, are redesigned, reformed into expressions of personal taste and identity. The shared products of material and symbolic culture are chosen or discarded, arranged and rearranged according to desire. ... Suburban streets are complex and subtle signifiers, offering, for those who can read the signs, delicate statements of style and status.”⁸⁸

The gendered aspects of suburban culture have also been shown to be more complex than traditionally thought. Although the suburban home was built around an ideology and a reality of women’s domestication, there were still possibilities for female empowerment. As Chambers and Clarke detail, limited opportunities for sharing activities could offer both conviviality and a measure of economic independence.⁸⁹

Middle-class identities and lives in the developing private suburbs were complex ones. On the surface at least they were characterised by, and often criticised for, an inward focus upon the family.

⁸⁶ A.D. King, ‘Excavating the multicultural suburb: hidden histories of the bungalow’, in R. Silverstone (Ed), *Visions of Suburbia*, 60-1; A. D. King, *The Bungalow: the production of a global culture* (London, 1995).

⁸⁷ J. Hartley, ‘The sexualization of suburbia’, 208.

⁸⁸ R. Silverstone, ‘Introduction’, 6-7.

⁸⁹ R. Silverstone, ‘Introduction’, 7; D. Chambers, ‘A stake in the country: women’s experiences of suburban development’, in R. Silverstone (Ed), *Visions of Suburbia*, 86-107; A.J. Clarke, ‘Tupperware: suburbia, sociality and mass consumption’, in R. Silverstone (Ed), *Visions of Suburbia*, 132-160.

“The modern suburb has usually been interpreted within the context of the rising middle class and critiques of its anti-urban, familialist aesthetic and ethic. ... Historians stress as motives for suburbanization the desire for domestic seclusion. ... Suburban homes were to recreate families free from the distractions and threats of the city.”⁹⁰

The traditional view is of a home and family-centred lifestyle, and this was evidenced not only in their social lives but also, for instance, in the imagery of their homes and gardens. Beyond this generalization, however, it has also been suggested that middle-class suburbia was not necessarily typified by anomie, domestic isolation, reserved lifestyles and social and physical monotony. Life in the private suburbs was more diverse and less monolithic than has frequently been envisaged. This was the case too, I wish to suggest, with the cottage council estates.

(ii) Housing Deserts Devoid Of Oases Of Community.

Although the cottage council estates embodied the Garden City designs for a new way of life there has been surprisingly little analysis of the lifestyles that did develop upon them. The majority of work that does exist is concentrated on “understanding the shaping of the physical environment and public administration.”⁹¹ As Hughes and Hunt note:

“Histories of housing have rarely had much to offer to historians of culture. Technical, institutional and political issues have predominated; quantitative matters - overcrowding or numbers of houses built - have often been more important than the more elusive effects the home has on people. Housing, ironically, has been seen as a public issue rather than for its impact on private life. Town planning, the expansion of municipal powers, rent strikes are characteristic topics. *Much less attention has been paid to the impact changes in housing have on the lives of the people who live in it.*”⁹²

There has, however, been a limited degree of social analysis of the estates in terms of community. Whilst private suburbia is disparaged for its culture of privacy the

⁹⁰ G. Cross, ‘The suburban weekend’, 109.

⁹¹ A. Olecnowicz, ‘The Economic and Social Development of Inter-war Out-county Municipal Housing Estates, with Special Reference to the London County Council’s Becontree and Dagenham Estate’, unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of Oxford, 1990), 11.

⁹² A. Hughes & K. Hunt, ‘A Culture Transformed? Women’s Lives in Wythenshawe in the 1930s’, in A. Davies & S. Fielding (Ed.), *Workers’ Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1992), 74. My emphasis.

suburban council estates are denigrated for their lack of community – by both contemporary and present day writers. This view of the estates is problematic and provides the basis for my investigation of their social life.

Beginning at the time the houses were first being occupied, the lack of a “familiar community structure excited much contemporary discussion and some criticism.”⁹³ In particular, there were the early community studies of sociologists such as Young, Durant, and Jevons and Madge.⁹⁴ Ruth Durant undertook a study of the London County Council’s Watling estate in the mid-1930s. In writing about the estate’s early years she notes how the tenants were all Londoners, wage earners and parents in an unfamiliar environment which lacked the usual amenities of city life. The tenants were oppressed, she tells us, by a sense of loneliness. They also faced hostility from the surrounding areas. The tenants, therefore, came together as “a territorial group of people, with a common way of living, [and] shared common objectives,” and so, at this time, “the Estate ... was indeed a community.”

There were also, however, specific features which impeded communal life. First, the people coming to the estate “carried with them no interests, no objectives, no institutions, *only their strong inhibition against mixing freely with their neighbours.*” Second, there was no unit of local government. Ward and estate boundaries did not coincide and three local authorities ministered to the estate’s needs and, as such, “loyalty to none of them is particularly encouraged.” Yet, if there had been just one local authority and it had equipped Watling generously with amenities, “civic pride might grow.” Third, Durant tells us, there were no local traditions because of the mobility of the population. In view of the constant turnover of its population, she wrote that “Watling is not much more than a huge hotel without a roof.”

Watling’s early community, Durant tells us, was only a temporary phenomenon - “it happened for a short while.” Thereafter, the estate’s corporate life became disjointed, consisting of self-contained, competing groups. Most residents

⁹³ J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, 231.

⁹⁴ See T. Young, *Becontree and Dagenham: A Report Made for the Pilgrim Trust* (London, 1934); R. Durant, *Watling: A Survey of Social Life on a New Housing Estate* (London, 1939); and J. Madge & R. Jevons, *Housing Estates* (London, 1946).

retreated into exclusive domesticity, becoming isolated human beings. “They reverted to ‘keeping themselves to themselves’.” After a few years the Watling estate, according to Durant, was no longer “like a traditional community of people.”⁹⁵

The community studies genre of which Durant was a part was to reach a peak in the 1950s and 1960s with the work of the Institute of Community Studies.⁹⁶

Thereafter it became intellectually discredited. A frequent lack of numerical data, even the basic population statistics, ensured that many of the studies were not comparable. Their highly descriptive and narrative style also risked them being dismissed as “mere pieces of documentary history, contributing little to our knowledge of social processes.”⁹⁷ Durant, for instance, writing later as Ruth Glass, felt obliged to condemn community studies as “the poor sociologist’s substitute for a novel.”⁹⁸

Yet concern with the concept of community on the inter-war cottage council estates has continued unabated. Branson and Heinemann, for instance, in their social history of *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* tell us that:

“The sense of belonging to a community was particularly lacking in the new housing estates on the outer rings. For at least in the old drab central areas people had grown up together, been to the same school, met one another in their leisure hours in the old way. ... But in the outer suburbs they had as yet no roots, and many of the things to which they were accustomed were still lacking. ... Communal services and buildings, churches, schools, libraries, clinics and public meeting places were slow in coming: on some of the newest estates even the shops were a long way away, let alone the bus services.”⁹⁹

Daunton says much the same, but is somewhat more succinct:

“Perhaps the major criticism of design in the 1920s and 1930s was the lack of attention given to the provision of amenities and to the development of a sense of community. ... The estates were ... often isolated from employment, shops and recreation facilities.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ R. Durant, *Watling*, 116-20. My emphasis.

⁹⁶ See J. Platt, *Social Research in Bethnal Green* (London, 1971).

⁹⁷ C. Bell & H. Newby, *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community* (London, 1971), 13.

⁹⁸ R. Glass, *Conflict in Society*, 148.

⁹⁹ N. Branson & M. Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (St. Albans, 1973), 84.

¹⁰⁰ M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, 28.

As recently as 1990 F.M.L. Thompson has reiterated this criticism. Lacking “community-building features and amenities”, the cottage council estates were, he argues, “often housing deserts devoid of oases of community.”¹⁰¹

Academic writing on the presence, or otherwise, of community on the inter-war estates is, however, extremely problematic. First, the municipal estates were “very frequently mentioned by writers who had no first hand knowledge of them and who used them to illustrate their grand theories of the development of modern mass industrial societies,” emphasising, as do both Mowat and Daunton, “the conventional wisdom, that the estates lacked the neighbourliness and closeness of older, inner city communities.”¹⁰² Second, the term ‘community’ is very problematic. Macintyre, for instance, notes that “the notion of the community is used and abused in a seemingly endless variety of contexts.”¹⁰³ Quite simply, community means different things to different people.

This thesis aims to make a original contribution to the understanding of social life upon the cottage council estates by re-examining this question of community. In order to properly evaluate the generalisation that these estates were lacking in ‘community’ it is necessary to see what it did mean to different people. Doing so means first paying attention to the term ‘community’ in order to show its problematic nature and to answer questions concerning its meaning, validity and use.

D. Community: Non-concept Or Discursive Keyword?

In spite of the continuing popularity of the idea of community there is considerable confusion as to precisely what the concept entails. As Bell and Newby note,

“The concept of community has been the concern of sociologists for more than two hundred years, yet a satisfactory definition of it in sociological

¹⁰¹ F.M.L. Thompson, ‘Town and City’, 80-1.

¹⁰² A. Olecnowicz, ‘The Economic and Social Development of Inter-war Out-county Municipal Housing Estates, with Special Reference to the London County Council’s Becontree and Dagenham Estate’, 11.

¹⁰³ S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London, 1980), 176.

terms appears as remote as ever. Most sociologists appear to have weighed in with their own idea of what a community consists of - and in this lies much of the confusion.”¹⁰⁴

Thus, Hillery in 1955 was able to identify ninety-four different definitions in which there was an absence of agreement beyond the fact that community involves people. Gilbert comments that more definitions would doubtless be found today, and Eyles notes that the concept is “ambiguous, nebulous, almost intangible.”¹⁰⁵

Perhaps unsurprisingly many geographers and sociologists now reject community as a useful way of characterising a particular form of local social relations.¹⁰⁶ Stacey, for instance, arguing that the ‘community’ is a non-concept, suggests an avoidance of the term altogether and its replacement with the study of local social systems.¹⁰⁷ Macfarlane, as Gilbert notes, is also ready to describe the concept as meaningless.¹⁰⁸ Yet, as Eyles shows, the notion of community retains “significance in both academic practice and everyday life.”¹⁰⁹ It still exerts a remarkable hold over both the intellectual and popular mind.¹¹⁰ “People manifestly believe in the notion of community” since “it refers to symbols, values, and ideologies which have popular currency.”¹¹¹

This ‘popular currency’ stems in part from the fact that the relations of community are frequently depicted as being “loving, emotional, affirming, supportive, and as the opposite of oppressive, contractual, instrumental, and competitive.”¹¹² It is Tönnies, “the founding father of the theory of community,”¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ C. Bell & H. Newby, *Community Studies*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ See G. A. Hillery Jr, ‘Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement’, *Rural Sociology* 20 (1955), 117; D. Gilbert, *Class, Community, and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields 1850-1926* (Oxford, 1992), 31; and J. Eyles, *Senses of Place* (Warrington, 1985), 59.

¹⁰⁶ See G. Rose, ‘Imagining Poplar in the 1920s: Contested Concepts of Community’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 16 (4) (1990), 425.

¹⁰⁷ See M. Stacey, ‘The Myth of Community Studies’, *British Journal of Sociology* 20 (1969), 134-47.

¹⁰⁸ See A. Macfarlane, ‘History, Anthropology and the Study of Communities’, *Social History* (5) (1977), 631-58; and D. Gilbert, *Class, Community, and Collective Action*, 31.

¹⁰⁹ J. Eyles, *Senses of Place*, 59.

¹¹⁰ See A. P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1992), 7.

¹¹¹ A.P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, 8.

¹¹² E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 252.

¹¹³ C. Bell & H. Newby, *Community Studies*, 23.

who expresses these ideas most clearly in his treatment of two forms of human association, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* - community and society.¹¹⁴ Essentially these were polar opposites with *Gesellschaft* reflecting large-scale, impersonal and contractual ties, becoming more widespread at the expense of *Gemeinschaft*.¹¹⁵ In *Gemeinschaft*, human relations were long-lasting, inclusive, and intimate; status was ascriptive rather than achieved; enduring loyalties to people and place existed; and face-to-face association and co-operation dominated.¹¹⁶ For Tönnies community relations were “rooted in natural will, instinct, and feeling, and especially in ‘reciprocal binding sentiment’ which led to ‘mutual furtherance and affirmation’.”¹¹⁷ Recognising this, Nisbet argues that community:

“[A]s we find it in much nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought encompasses all forms of relationship which are characterised by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time. Community is founded on man [sic] conceived in his wholeness rather than in one or another of his roles, taken separately, that he may hold in a social order. It draws its psychological strength from levels of motivation deeper than those of mere volition or interest, and it achieves its fulfilment in a submergence of individual will that is not possible in unions of mere convenience or rational assent.”¹¹⁸

Community is seen as a “morally valued way of life.”¹¹⁹ It is a term upheld with great warmth and, as such, it is a much sought after social ideal.

However, this emotive power and this desire for community has ensured that the term is not always used in a neutral manner. Instead it has the potential to be a “device for the protection and promotion of sectional interests.”¹²⁰ Groups can choose to adopt and preach their own “rhetorics of community”, giving it their own meanings and definitions, in order to attach the warm feelings associated with the

¹¹⁴ See F. Tönnies, *Community and Association* (London, 1887).

¹¹⁵ See C. Bell & H. Newby, *Community Studies*, 24-5.

¹¹⁶ See J. Eyles, *Senses of Place*, 76.

¹¹⁷ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 253.

¹¹⁸ R. A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (London, 1966), 48.

¹¹⁹ See J. A. Agnew, ‘The Devaluation of Place in Social Science’, in J. A. Agnew & J. S. Duncan (Eds.), *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (London, 1989), 10.

¹²⁰ J. Eyles, *Senses of Place*, 70.

term to what are frequently unequal social relationships.¹²¹ By dovetailing the emotive sentiment of community with forms - meanings - of community which represent particular ways of life, those particular ways of life can be promoted or legitimated above others. The quest for community can help “to reproduce certain social relations and interests.”¹²²

Cater and Jones, for instance, note that “the ruling class has rarely failed to appreciate the efficacy of community as political bromide.” Attempts to revitalize the inner city from the late 1960s onwards, they argue, have often been labelled as ‘Community Development’, using the term to suggest “tangible ‘proof’ that ‘society cares’.” Yet such programmes are also a “remarkably cheap (and effective) way of purchasing social order” with ‘community health’ and ‘community education’ schemes being run by unwaged labour. ‘Community’, in this instance, is a “social control mechanism for less successful citizens.”¹²³ Along these lines Corrigan offers an even stronger view when he tells us that the tank is one of “the two major symbols of control” in capitalist society, the other one being the community worker.¹²⁴ It should not be thought, however, that the use of the ideal of community in this way is restricted solely to the ‘ruling class’ or the powerful. Other groups, aware of its emotive power, may also adopt and preach ‘community’ to mobilise support for their activities.

In view of its popular currency and emotive power, therefore, many academics now refuse to discard the term community. Quite the opposite in fact for a study of community can be surprisingly enlightening. Rose, for instance, notes that:

“The chaos of its conceptualization and the warmth with which it is upheld as a social ideal are not seen as difficulties which render the concept useless for our attempts to understand society, but as the very reasons for its interest. ‘Community’ is a keyword, and struggles over its meaning reveal much about

¹²¹ G. Rose, ‘Imagining Poplar in the 1920s’, 426.

¹²² J. Eyles, *Senses of Place*, 83.

¹²³ J. Cater & T. Jones, *Social Geography: An Introduction to Contemporary Issues* (London, 1989), 181-92.

¹²⁴ P. Corrigan, ‘The Local State: The Struggle for Democracy’, *Marxism Today* (July, 1979), 57.

the social, political, economic and cultural power relations of specific times and places.”¹²⁵

However, it is clearly not the traditional community study that Rose is advocating here. There is no importance placed upon the notion of community as a specific form of social organisation or material reality. As Cohen puts it, “community does not exist ... in the doing of social behaviour. It ... should not be confused with geographic or sociographic assertions of fact.”¹²⁶ Instead, it is the meanings attributed to community, and the contestation of those meanings, that are believed to be revealing. According to Rose, community should therefore be viewed not as “a social structure but a structure of meaning.”¹²⁷ That is to say that, much like Raymond Williams’s “structures of feeling”, concern should be focused upon the different “meanings and values” of community “as they are actively lived and felt” by different individuals and groups. As Williams says:

“We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a ‘structure’: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension.”¹²⁸

Yet Williams’s notions of ‘structures of feeling’ are problematic. They are ill-defined. However, his ideas of sets of meanings with specific internal relations are similar to ideas of discourse. Discourse is a concept that is more useful here. Given such an emphasis upon the meaning of community or, more specifically, the variety of meanings, and the legitimizing uses of the construct, it is possible to examine it as a discursive structure.¹²⁹ However, if the notion of community raises questions concerning its meaning, validity and use, much the same may well be said about the term discourse, around which definitions and theories abound. Before further envisaging community in such a manner an engagement with the extensive

¹²⁵ G. Rose, ‘Imagining Poplar in the 1920s’, 425.

¹²⁶ See A.P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, 98.

¹²⁷ G. Rose, ‘Imagining Poplar in the 1920s’, 425; see also E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 230.

¹²⁸ R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1978), 132.

¹²⁹ G. Rose, ‘Imagining Poplar in the 1920s’, 425.

literature surrounding 'discourse' and a clarification of its use within this thesis is necessary.

Work centering upon the notion of discourse first emerged in the late 1960s, when fundamental new questions began to be asked about how social meanings were created. It was proposed that individuals were not the primary sources of meanings, but that the meanings of words used in a particular language (as in English or French, etc.) could vary and would depend upon the discourses in which they were used. Discourses, in the Foucauldian sense of the term at least, are perhaps best envisaged as institutional and textual frameworks for understanding the world. They are also frameworks for constructing the world since 'objects' are seen by Foucault to be created within discourse. The frameworks of discourse allow people "to be able to look at things from such and such an angle and not from some other one."¹³⁰ In other words, discourses "enable and limit particular ways of thinking and acting."¹³¹ Because of this, they are a way of constructing individuals. The work of Foucault especially emphasises this. His histories of madness, criminality and sexuality, for instance, provide a critique of the way modern societies discipline their populations by establishing norms for human behaviour.¹³² The concept of discourse, therefore, in very general terms, offers insights into the relationship between socially constructed meanings (or representations) and power. In the particular case of this thesis, it provides a useful tool to theorize the construction of different meanings of community and their use to legitimize particular ways of life. I will discuss this in two stages, drawing in the main upon the work of Foucault. First, I want to examine the ways in which discourses can be seen as frameworks for understanding the world. Second, I want to elaborate upon the creation of objects within discourse and the relationship between such frameworks and power.

¹³⁰ D. Macdonell, *Theories of Discourse* (Oxford, 1987), 82. M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (Brighton, 1980), 211.

¹³¹ D. Macdonell, *Theories of Discourse*, 8; & J.T. Kenny, 'Climate, Race, and Imperial Authority: The Symbolic Landscape of the British Hill Station in India', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85 (4) (1995), 695.

¹³² M. Philp, 'Michel Foucault', in Q. Skinner (Ed.), *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1985), 67.

To conceptualise discourses as frameworks for understanding it is necessary to appreciate that statements produced within a discourse are governed by sets of rules. Such rules, for instance, will determine what things statements can be made about, what the statements can say about these things, and which of the statements are true or false. A discourse then is essentially a system of possibility about what can and can not be said. Foucault illustrates this point at the beginning of *The Order of Things* by quoting a classification system taken from a fictional Chinese encyclopedia. This places animals into the following categories:

“(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that look from a long way off like flies.”¹³³

What Foucault is showing us by means of this imaginary classification is the particular nature of our own frameworks for understanding the world.

Understanding the world by reference to our own discourses it is impossible to conceive of the world in the manner above. As Philp puts it, “we operate within a system of possibility - and this system both enables us to do certain things, and limits us to this system and these things.”¹³⁴

A similar example of a particular discourse allowing people ‘to look at things from such and such an angle and not from some other one’ is provided by Foucault’s comments on the relationship between Gregor Mendel and biological science. Mendel’s work on the basic tenets of genetics was not accepted during his lifetime, his contributions to the discipline only being recognised after his death. Of this Foucault comments:

“Here was a new object, calling for new conceptual tools, and for fresh theoretical foundations. Mendel spoke the truth, but he was not within the true of contemporary biological discourse. ... A whole change in scale, the deployment of a totally new range of objects in biology was required before Mendel could enter into the true and his propositions appear, for the most part, exact.”¹³⁵

¹³³ M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 1970), xv.

¹³⁴ M. Philp, ‘Michel Foucault’, 70.

¹³⁵ M. Foucault, *The Discourse on Language* (New York, 1971), 224.

Mendel's work was initially outside biological discourse, it was beyond the framework for understanding, and as such it was discounted as scientific knowledge until that framework was later modified.

By conceptualising fields of knowledge in this way, therefore, Foucault emphasises that discourses are not inherently correct, factual, or true. Claims to truth rely solely upon the rules of the discourse, which themselves cannot be rationally justified. He confronts views of how the world is seen with the need to consider alternative views. As Miles Ogborn *et al.* put it:

“Foucault's aim is to problematise the relationship between words and things. He suggests that there are lots of ways in which the world can be described and that we have no sure grounds to choose one over the others. In turn this also means that he is dedicated to recovering those ways of knowing that have been displaced and forgotten.”¹³⁶

Foucault sought to expose and help dismantle what he termed “totalising discourses” and to rediscover in turn “fragmented, subjugated, local and specific knowledge.”¹³⁷

Foucault achieved more than this however. He termed his histories of several of the human sciences - criminology and psychiatry for instance - genealogies, and by means of them he also unmasked the ways in which power operates within discourses. The human sciences, Foucault stressed, are discourses and his concern was with their ability to create objects of, for instance, study, analysis or discussion and to construct notions of, for instance, the criminal, crimes and forms of insanity and conversely ideals of the good citizen and normality. A frequently quoted example is his analysis of the form of insanity known as homicidal monomania. Madness in the eighteenth century, he tells us, had only been associated with cases of dementia, imbecility or furor. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, psychiatrists broke with these conventions. Faced with crimes of murder committed without profit, passion, reason or motive and yet not preceded, accompanied or followed by any recognised forms of madness, they rejected the conventions of the previous century and argued that the criminals were

¹³⁶ E. Baldwin, B. Longhurst, S. McCracken, M. Ogborn & G. Smith, *Introducing Cultural Studies* (London, forthcoming), no page numbers.

¹³⁷ M. Philp, ‘Michel Foucault’, 76.

insane. They termed the condition ‘homocidal monomania’. The only evidence for the insanity however was the crime.¹³⁸ Foucault comments:

“Nineteenth-century psychiatry invented an entirely fictitious entity, a crime which is insanity, a crime which is nothing but insanity, an insanity which is nothing but crime.”¹³⁹

It was in this ability to produce such classifications of the criminal and the madman, that is to create the ‘homocidal monomaniac’, and to then suggest forms of treatment for such deviants, that Foucault argued power existed. Foucault, it needs to be realised, did not theorise power in a standard manner. For him, power is not repressive, but rather productive.¹⁴⁰ We can see therefore that the discourses of the human sciences exercised power by being able to superintend the mores and life of society by producing objects of study and analysis such as ‘homocidal monomania’ together with notions of what is aberrant, thus also establishing rules and criteria for what is normal. As Philp describes it the human sciences attempt to define normality and establish this normality as a rule of life for us all.

“In workplaces, schoolrooms, hospitals and welfare offices; in the family and the community; and in prisons, mental institutions, courtrooms and tribunals, the human sciences have established their standards of ‘normality’. The normal child, the healthy body, the stable mind, the good citizen, the perfect wife and the proper man - such concepts haunt our ideas about ourselves, and are reproduced and legitimated through the practices of teachers, social workers, judges, policemen and administrators.”¹⁴¹

Foucault effectively replaces repression with the concept of normalization and shows that power is exercised more in forms of control than prohibition.¹⁴² Moreover, this is the case not just with the formalised systems of the human sciences. Popular, widespread ideas concerning, for instance, sexual norms and deviations serve a similar purpose.¹⁴³ Essentially, Foucault was a historian of the civilizing process;

¹³⁸ M. Philp, ‘Michel Foucault’, 71-2.

¹³⁹ M. Foucault, *I, Pierre Riviere, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother* (Harmondsworth, 1978), 5-6.

¹⁴⁰ M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 119.

¹⁴¹ M. Philp, ‘Michel Foucault’, 67.

¹⁴² P. O’Brien, ‘Michel Foucault’s History of Culture’, in L. Hunt (Ed.), *The New Cultural History* (London, 1989), 38.

¹⁴³ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth, 1979).

“his works,” as Patricia O’Brien notes, “represent a startling analysis of the civilization of the West in terms of normalization and discipline.”¹⁴⁴

Here, therefore, we can see the value in treating community not solely as a structure of meaning, but also as a discursive structure. Discourses may be viewed as frameworks for understanding the world in which power operates by virtue of the ability of discourses to construct notions of what is normal and true. If community can be conceptualized in different ways and attributed different meanings then, in effect, there are different systems of possibility for what community can be - different frameworks for understanding. Furthermore, such different conceptualizations of community legitimate the different ways of life each conceptualization represents by virtue of the emotive and warm associations of the notion. In effect, appeals for a ‘community’ way of life enable some actions and avenues of thought, but limit others since the ‘community’ way of life is implicitly the true, correct and normal way of life. As Cohen so neatly puts it, community is a meaningfully constructed system of values, norms, and moral codes.¹⁴⁵ Community is an object created in discourse (and practice) and that is where its characteristics – warm, positive, and so forth – arise. In light of the above discussion, therefore, different conceptualizations of community - in terms of different frameworks of meanings and sentiments attributed to the notion - and the different ways of life these legitimate, do represent different discourses of community, and it is in this sense that the notion of a discourse of community is used throughout this thesis. Such a theoretical understanding of discourse is not without its difficulties. In Chapter Two I discuss the difficulties of identifying different discourses of community. It was not as simple as this chapter or Foucault *et al.* make it sound.

E. ‘Community As Service’ And The Cottage Estates.

This is an approach that to a limited extent others have adopted. In ‘On the Uses of “Community”’ the Yeos describe how the Community Associations formed

¹⁴⁴ P. O’Brien, ‘Michel Foucault’s History of Culture’, 33.

¹⁴⁵ A.P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, 9, 38.

on post-World War I council estates preached a particular discourse of community. The Yeos term this discourse 'Community as Service'. It is necessary to discuss their work in some detail. First, the Yeos' history of the origins and early use of the discourse of 'community as service' is outlined. Second, I set out the Yeos' description of the Community Association movement emphasising their account of the movement's use of 'community as service' on the cottage estates.

(i) The Origins Of 'Community As Service'.

'Community as service', "service, often through voluntary association, but service to a constructed, public entity", first originated, the Yeos argue, in the nineteenth century as a response by local Liberal leaders to socialist practices of community. Thereafter it became important to a number of individuals and movements. Middle-class women interested in public work, for instance, "presented themselves as social mothers doing self-sacrificial service to the poor and to the community."¹⁴⁶

The catalyst for this discourse was the creation by socialists of Halls of Science. Owned and controlled by working people, and containing libraries and reading rooms, these Halls allowed their users to practise their own versions of education, recreation and religion. They were independent enclaves of working-class territory. They were also imposing. In Manchester in 1840, the city's largest meeting rooms were to be found in the Hall of Science.¹⁴⁷

In control of the urban boroughs, the Liberals were unwilling to accept such independent working-class action. They attempted to provide rival cultural institutions in more imposing buildings in order to displace the facilities supplied by the working people for themselves. Or if the facilities were not displaced they would be absorbed. The Manchester Hall of Science was bought from the socialists and transformed into Britain's first free Public Library.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 234-5.

¹⁴⁷ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 234-6.

¹⁴⁸ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 236-7.

At the same time keywords within the political language of the socialists were appropriated by the Liberals to describe the new civitas. 'Community' was one such keyword with, the Yeos argue, a rich socialist history:

"In the early nineteenth century, Owenite socialists and co-operators achieved a near monopoly over the keyword in its sense as a positive, self-made quality of social relationship. ... They dominated and developed the idea of community as mutuality. Between 1829 and 1845, they built a nation-wide, largely working-class movement which carried a vision of communities of mutual co-operation and which had an intellectual influence on working people out of all proportion to its numbers."¹⁴⁹

In contrast to these socialist discourses of community, however, the 'community' of the mid-nineteenth-century middle class was not a positive, self-made quality of social relationship based on mutual co-operation. Rather it was to be generated by the new public facilities. Central to its creation was service in local government and voluntary associations:

"Through service in local government and voluntary associations, public life was to bring 'the community', in the sense of everybody within the local state, into 'community' in the sense of a new kind of caring union."¹⁵⁰

Excluded from previous socialist discourses of community, the Liberals had thus created a form of community which included and privileged themselves.

This was particularly the case, the Yeos tell us, since the new public facilities, such as hospitals, libraries, parks, town halls and so forth, were no longer produced by the users nor were they controlled by them. Rather it was the 'bourgeois men', who developed and then ran the public facilities, that had decisive power. 'Community as service' was "very much a version of community provided through the service of middle-class governors and philanthropists for the people."¹⁵¹ It was community made for the people and imposed from above. It was not community made by 'the people'.

¹⁴⁹ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 232.

¹⁵⁰ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 236-7.

¹⁵¹ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 238.

(ii) The Community Association Movement.

Such a discourse of 'community as service', the Yeos argue, was also visible in the twentieth century upon the cottage council estates. Middle-class groups dedicated to social service, they explain, formed Community Associations and Community Centres on estates "composed only of working-class people" in which they could carry out their social service. Prominent among these groups were the Settlement movement and the National Council of Social Service [N.C.S.S.].¹⁵² The Yeos are, however, keen to emphasise that this was not a simple act of philanthropy. Just as the middle class of the nineteenth century when confronted by the Halls of Science "had tried to replace, and in some cases to take over, the cultural initiatives of militant working-class movements," so the Community Association movement was a reaction to the growth of residents' and tenants' associations on the new municipal estates. These tenants' and residents' associations, in the view of the Yeos, had arisen in the wider context of the industrial militancy of the 1920s. The Yeos stress that 'community as service' involved an "inability to leave independent working-class mutuality alone." There were repeated attempts "to absorb it or replace it with a practice designed to make middle-class service indispensable."¹⁵³

The intention of the N.C.S.S. and other similar organisations was to enclose the associations, or "estate agitations", "within the bricks and mortar of Community Associations."¹⁵⁴ To achieve their aims, in the face of opposition from the tenants, a central weapon was the "banner of community."¹⁵⁵ As Ernest Barker of the N.C.S.S. explained:

"We welcome with open arms Tenants' Associations if they are democratically organised for the general social welfare of their estates over and above bodies dealing with the questions of the relation of landlord and tenant. But the title 'Tenants' Association' does perhaps suggest as the basis of your union that you are a tenant, and have a landlord confronting you, and that there is antagonism between landlord and tenant. I know the Tenants' Associations transcend their names. They are in effect Community Associations. But I have a sneaking preference for the title 'Community'.

¹⁵² E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 239.

¹⁵³ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 242.

¹⁵⁴ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 241.

¹⁵⁵ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 242.

It has a deep human effect - that you have a neighbourhood feeling towards each other as good neighbours, and that you are going to act together for good purposes as good neighbours.”¹⁵⁶

This was an ideological discourse of community. The Community Association movement were using the term “to conceal, or, as they would see it, transcend, social antagonism.” They were attempting “to harmonize social relations without disturbing inequalities of class or gender power.”¹⁵⁷

On the Watling estate in Middlesex, for instance, the Yeos note that the Watling Residents’ Association [W.R.A.] was set up following attacks on the estate and its residents in the local press. Besides campaigning to the London County Council [L.C.C.] for a meeting-place, it also started “schemes of co-operation and mutual aid, like a loan and share-out club and collective lawnmowing.” In response to this, according to the Yeos, surrounding residents “interested in the welfare of Watling” formed their own Watling Association [W.A.], called themselves “the local Community interest”, and “carried the keyword around as their own.” Eventually the two groups merged, but not without the suspicion of the Residents’ Association who resented the use of the word ‘community’. So much so, the Yeos argue, that the estate’s resulting community centre was named simply the ‘Watling Centre’: “the word ‘community’ being somewhat out of favour.”¹⁵⁸

Still, by their invocation of ‘community as service’, the middle-class ‘Community interest’ had achieved their aim of displacing working-class mutuality or militancy.¹⁵⁹ This, the Yeos point out, was not just the case within the formal organisation of the residents’ association, but also outside “where the mutual aid was informal, as in the case of women’s networks.”¹⁶⁰

“Community Associations, while purporting to answer the sexism of Working Men’s Clubs, had few women officers in their committee structures and few women writers for the CA newspaper. ... Community Associations

¹⁵⁶ E. Barker, ‘Tenants’ and Community Associations’, 34. Quoted in E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 239.

¹⁵⁷ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 238.

¹⁵⁸ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 242-3.

¹⁵⁹ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 235.

¹⁶⁰ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 242.

never seemed to relate to the neighbourhood networks among women which provided economic and emotional support so important for survival.”¹⁶¹

To emphasise the point then, the ‘community’ of the Community Association was not a version of community made amongst the residents. It was made for them and imposed upon them from above.

F. Community, Class And Council Estates.

The Yeo’s account of Community Associations and their use of the term ‘community’ is certainly useful. Their discussion is somewhat generalised however, and I now want to suggest issues they raise which need a more detailed treatment. I begin by raising the question of whether the estate tenants and the tenants’ associations had their own discourses of community. I then argue that the Yeos both misrepresent and over-generalize the working-class nature of the estate residents and their associations.

(i) Versions Of Community.

A central feature of the Yeos’ discussion, as I have attempted to show above, is that the ‘community’ of the Community Association movement was not ‘community’ made by ‘the people’. The Yeos explicitly state this:

“They have tried to force a union between the community as supplied from above with its basically unequal social structures and community created from inside.”¹⁶²

“Although situated where people had their homes, the middle-class view of community with its stress on service in formal organisations tended to restrict working-class women and to displace their communities.”¹⁶³

In contrast to conventional sociological wisdom then, the Yeos are suggesting that the residents were part of a community, a ‘community created from inside’.

Moreover, they also stress that there were conflicts over what the notion of

¹⁶¹ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 241.

¹⁶² E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 238.

¹⁶³ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 241.

community meant.¹⁶⁴ They do not, however, go on to detail either these conflicts or the precise nature of the residents' discourses of 'community'. It is emphasised that 'community created from inside' was related to the residents' mutuality and was based on "supportive and more ethical human relations", but beyond this little is said.¹⁶⁵ Further, the Yeos also fail to make it clear whether the tenants' associations on the estates used a discourse of community. It is in fact implied that they did not since:

"More formal working-class associations had difficulty in using the keyword [community] ... because middle-class groups had used it to displace working-class activity."¹⁶⁶

To question the generalization that the cottage council estates were devoid of community, I want to suggest that it is necessary to investigate *both* the discourse of community from the viewpoint of the residents of the estates and that of the tenants' associations to see where they were similar and where they differed. Doing so raises a further question about the Yeos' arguments: their view of the cottage council estates, their residents, their associations, and hence their discourses of community, as being homogenously working-class.

(ii) *Class And Community.*

The Yeos describe the cottage estates upon which the Community Association movement became active as "as large as existing cities and *composed only of working-class people.*"¹⁶⁷ This point remains central throughout their account. They show the middle class raising the banner of 'community as service' to displace the mutuality and potential militancy of the working-class tenants.

Whether the cottage estates were composed solely of working class people is, however, open to debate. I will cover this in greater depth in Chapters Three and Four, but suffice to say here that many authors have noted that rent levels and local authority selection policies ensured that a large proportion of the new municipal

¹⁶⁴ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 235.

¹⁶⁵ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 238.

¹⁶⁶ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 244.

¹⁶⁷ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 239. My emphasis.

houses were in fact occupied by middle-class tenants. Daunton, for instance, draws attention to the presence of white-collar workers.¹⁶⁸ On this basis alone it can be argued that the social make-up of the residents and their associations was more complex than the Yeos make out.

Further, however, and leaving aside the question of whether the estates were solely working-class, there is another reason to examine in greater detail the class composition of the estates. The general argument of the Yeos that “in the wider context of the industrial militancy of the 1920s” the tenants of the estates pursued ‘working-class’ aims, with their mutuality “organised into formal and sometimes militant associations” depicts the working class and its activities in rather monolithic terms.¹⁶⁹ The residents and associations of the estates, and their discourses of community, I wish to argue, were not so homogenous. On the contrary, class formation on the cottage council estates was specific to the local context of each estate. Here Michael Savage’s work provides a basis for the argument that class structures need to be understood in relation to the specific places where they are formed.

A point emphasised by Savage is the influence of an area’s occupational structure upon the potential forms of collective action and ideas of collectivity that will occur there. To support this broad argument he provides several examples. The engineers, shipbuilders and builders of Kentish London, for instance, had a strong co-operative movement and practised their own education through the Greenwich Mutual Improvement Society.¹⁷⁰ Of similarly skilled artisans of mid-Victorian Edinburgh, he notes, along the same lines, that “the more direct forms of patronage and control from above [were] typically resisted by artisans who insisted on the autonomy of their institutions.”¹⁷¹ In Reading, however, where there was a contrasting occupational structure because of the dominance of food-processing

¹⁶⁸ M.J. Daunton, ‘Housing’, in F.M.L. Thompson (Ed), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Volume 2, People and their Environment* (Cambridge, 1990), 240.

¹⁶⁹ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 242.

¹⁷⁰ G. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society* (London, 1978). See M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 44.

¹⁷¹ R. Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Mid-Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford, 1976). Quoted in M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 45.

companies in the town, he points out that ‘vice-presidential’ charities rather than autonomous working-class institutions were the focus of associational life, and employer-sponsored societies upstaged mutualist Friendly Societies.¹⁷² In this way, then, Savage differentiates the working class on the basis of its occupational structure. He links the forms of collective action in an area to the area’s occupational structure.

However, as he notes, the situation is rarely this clear. It is uncommon for the occupational structure of many localities to be as clear cut as the examples above and different groups of workers may pursue their own forms of collective action. Further, however, other place-specific aspects of the area must also be considered as they too may influence the type of collective action.¹⁷³ First, Savage stresses that the working class should not be differentiated just by occupation, but also in terms of the way it is gendered. In South Wales, for instance, health care was provided through the Medical Aid Societies.¹⁷⁴ Yet “most of this provision was geared to the male wage earner”, maternity care for example being of dubious quality.¹⁷⁵ In this instance then the forms of collective action of the area were patriarchal in that they were geared to benefiting men more than women. Male concerns were prioritized over female ones. This Savage attributes to the restriction of women to domestic labour and their lack of any institutional life in comparison to the dominance of “male solidarity ... based on the work place and social life more generally.”¹⁷⁶ In other areas, however, working-class solidarity was not necessarily based on gender difference. In the weaving areas of North-East Lancashire, for example, men and women frequently worked alongside one another in the formal economy and “household duties were shared quite evenly and equally between husband and wife.”¹⁷⁷ As such, Savage tells us that cross-gender movements more strongly

¹⁷² See S. Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London, 1976), 130, 40. M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 48.

¹⁷³ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 51.

¹⁷⁴ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 52.

¹⁷⁵ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 52, 31.

¹⁷⁶ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 52.

¹⁷⁷ D. Gittins, *Fair Sex* (London, 1982), 130. M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 54.

concerned with joint action and women's issues, such as women's suffrage, could develop.¹⁷⁸ The working class needs also to be understood in terms of "the precise structure of local gender relations."¹⁷⁹

Second, Savage draws attention to the influences of neighbourhood structure on the activities of working-class areas. For instance, neighbourhood stability and the presence of "institutional sites through which regular interaction takes place may be of vital importance in facilitating collective action" in that they encourage working-class solidarity.¹⁸⁰ Further, the relationships of working-class areas to outside groups are also important, though by no means unambiguous. A local elite may engender feelings of deprivation, for instance, so fuelling working-class militancy.¹⁸¹ Alternatively, the lack of an elite exercising control may also lead to working-class militancy.¹⁸² Savage suggests:

"In cases where working-class neighbourhood cohesion is weak, the existence of a local elite may well forestall working-class collective action: where strong, however, the existence of an elite can do little to prevent collective action but may influence the type of struggle engaged in."¹⁸³

To summarise Savage's argument, therefore, he is emphatic that when explaining working-class collective action detailed attention must be paid to the local context in which it occurs:

"The different types of struggle are not simply the product of tactical and strategic thought, but are brought about by elements of local social relations (which allow one form of struggle to take place rather than another)."¹⁸⁴

More specifically, working-class localities need to be individually understood in terms of their occupational structure, gender relations and neighbourhood structure.

¹⁷⁸ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 54.

¹⁷⁹ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 56.

¹⁸⁰ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 58-9.

¹⁸¹ R. Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1984). See M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 60.

¹⁸² See D. Cannadine, 'Residential Segregation in Nineteenth Century Towns: From Shapes on the Ground to Shapes in Society', in J.H. Johnson & C. Pooley (Eds.), *The Structure of Nineteenth Century Cities* (London, 1982). See M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 60.

¹⁸³ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 60.

¹⁸⁴ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 40.

To this I want to add, or at least I want to show in this thesis, that it is also necessary to consider that the forms of collective action and ideas of collectivity - discourses of community - existing in a place are not simply the products of class, but also help to constitute classes. First, class is mediated through culture. In the case of the cottage council estates, Hughes and Hunt, in their study of the Wythenshawe estate in Manchester, have noted the importance of a culture of respectability that could be adopted by the early tenants to distinguish themselves from 'rougher' tenants that arrived in the late 1930s and post-World War II period. The culture of respectability was used to define collectivities and class identities.¹⁸⁵ The depiction of the working class as a homogenous, undifferentiated mass simply does not fit this view. Second, the residents' understanding of class was also mediated through their forms of collective action - such as mutual aid practices, involvement in public forms of sociability, and involvement in the tenants' associations and community associations on the estates - and their more formal political alignments. This I will show helped to constitute cleavages within the class structures of the estates in terms of who related to whom, who took part in activities, and who stood apart.

Seen in this light, therefore, the Yeos' depiction of the cottage estate residents, their tenants' associations and their activities as characterised by 'working-class mutuality' and militancy is clearly too generalised. The Yeos fail to make it clear that the working class is not a homogenous group. They fail to make it clear that the nature of the working class varies from place to place, and they fail to explain the impact of this on the discourses of community - the ideas of collectivity - articulated by the working class. It is, I argue, necessary to carefully consider the effects of all these aspects - occupational structure, place, culture and politics - on the nature of class on these estates and the ways that it related to discourses of community rather than simply assuming that one monolithic working-class version of community faced a similarly monolithic middle-class view.

¹⁸⁵ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, 'A Culture Transformed?'.

G. Thesis Outline.

I am, therefore, concerned to problematize the generalization that the cottage council estates lacked 'community' and to show instead that there were a variety of 'discourses of community' on and around these estates. Achieving this means investigating the nature of these discourses of community from the viewpoint of, first, the residents of the estates and, second, the more formal estate tenants' associations, in order to provide a more detailed understanding of precisely what 'community' meant. In doing so I want to attempt to provide clearer and firmer groundings for the residents' discourses in terms of the social relations of the estates - relations of class, gender and neighbourhood structure. Further, I will also re-evaluate the Community Association movement's discourse of 'community as service' because, as I have shown, the context in which it was produced has been over-generalised, if not misleadingly portrayed. In order to achieve this the thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter Two demonstrates the suitability of a qualitative methodology and, in particular, a case study approach to this aim. The two estates of the London County Council - Roehampton and Watling - that this thesis focuses upon are introduced. It is shown that by means of a broad range of archival sources complemented by oral history interviews that it was possible, albeit sometimes with difficulty, to distinguish and reconstruct the discourses of community on the estates that are the attention of this research.

Chapter Three provides a contextual setting to the two estates that form my case study. It is shown that although the estates appear outwardly similar in terms of their construction in that they are both cottage council estates, the similarity did not extend to include their populations. The occupational structure of each estate in the inter-war period is shown to be significantly different. In comparison to Watling, it is argued that proportionately more residents of Roehampton were employed in jobs that might at the very least reflect lower middle-class status and values. This difference between the two estates is accounted for in terms of the timing of their construction by the L.C.C. and the factors which influenced the Council in its selection of residents for each estate.

Chapters Four, Five and Six are concerned to detail the discourses of community that form the basis of this thesis. In Chapter Four the discourses of community from the viewpoint of the residents of Roehampton and Watling are detailed. It is argued that the residents rejected the idea that their estates were lacking in community, but in so doing articulated ideals of community which differed between the estates. Particular emphasis is placed upon several aspects of the residents' communal sensibilities including their forms of public sociability, mutual aid ethics, cultures of respectability and imagining by outsiders. The differences in the discourses of community between the residents of Roehampton and Watling are accounted for in terms of the contrasting context of their material and social lives.

In Chapter Five I am concerned with the Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association [R.E.T.A.] and the Watling Residents' Association [W.R.A.] and their discourses of community. To fully contextualise these discourses the nature, objectives and activities of each Association is detailed at length. It is stressed that previous descriptions of such organisations do not apply in these two cases. It is further emphasised that although there were similarities between the Associations, there were also important differences. Again these are differences that can be accounted for in terms of the contrasting social structure of each estate. These differences, it is argued, underpinned their discourses of community with the result that, although sharing some similarities, they too differed between each estate. It is also highlighted that support from the residents of the estates for the Associations and their discourses of community was not greatly forthcoming.

Chapter Six re-evaluates the discourse of the Community Association movement. It is noted that the notion of 'service' was an inherent feature of the discourse. It is argued, however, that the principle underlying the discourse was not the displacement of working-class activity, but rather the elevation of the morality of the tenants of the cottage council estates. The success of the Community Association movement in its promotion of its discourse of moral community on Roehampton and Watling is examined. It is shown that the promotion encountered difficulties specific to each estate and was hardly successful on either.

Overall this thesis seeks to show the intimate interplay between discourse and local social relations. Rather than there being no community on these estates it is argued that there were a variety of discourses of community which need to be understood in relation to the organisations and relationships - both formal and informal - of which they were a part and to which they gave meaning. Instead of the use of 'community' on the estates being a matter of the ideological imposition of one version onto one class by another it is argued that this was far from successful. Setting out these histories reveals the strength of other versions - or discourses - of community.

CHAPTER TWO - METHODOLOGY: IN THE RECORD OFFICE AND THE LIVING ROOM.

A. Introduction.

As the previous chapter has explained the focus of this thesis is an exploration of the various meanings that people attached to the word 'community' in its uses within and around the suburban cottage council estates of the inter-war period. This entails identifying the differing discourses, rhetorics, conceptualizations and interpretations of community which existed, and then offering an explanation for their emergence, promotion, and geography. The purpose of this chapter is to detail how this can be achieved.

I begin with a brief assessment of the suitability of a qualitative approach to these aims. Qualitative methods, it is argued, should be privileged over quantitative methods in this particular case, although care should be taken not to exaggerate or overestimate the benefits and possibilities they offer. The reasoning behind choosing a comparative case study approach is then presented. This is coupled with an explanation of the reasons for choosing the particular estates which I have studied. Next, the specific sources of archival and oral history are considered with their attendant possibilities and problems. Finally, the procedures for analyzing and interpreting the 'data' are outlined. Here it is pointed out that, although it may well be "a routine part of being in the world", the crucial act of exploring meaning has to be carefully considered "to increase the level of consciousness with which it is done in order to raise it to the level of a method."¹

¹ M. Ogborn, 'Teaching qualitative historical geography', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 16 (2) (1992), 147.

B. "Qualitative Research Reaches Parts That Other Techniques Don't."

An accepted and universal definition of community as a social structure is very elusive. Many writers have despaired of its continued use. The alternative adopted here is to view it instead as a discursive structure. To suggest that this can be "meaningfully measured", or quantified, is clearly erroneous.³ A quantitative research strategy was viewed as inappropriate for this project.

Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, appeared much more suitable. Even the most superficial and cursory reading of the literature, for instance, will reveal that they are "used to find out about people."⁴ Moreover, they view men and women:

"Not as organisms responding, Pavlovian fashion, to some external stimulus, nor inexorably driven by internal needs and instincts, nor as 'cultural dopes', but as persons, who *construct* the meaning and significance of their realities ... by bringing to bear upon events a complex personal framework of beliefs and values, which they have developed over their lives to categorise, characterise, explain and predict the events in their worlds."⁵

As John Eyles notes, qualitative research methods are "in sum concerned with the understanding and analysis of meanings in specific contexts." Their aim is "to uncover the nature of the social world through an understanding of how people act in and give meaning to their own lives."⁶ Thus, they seem relevant to an attempt to understand and explore different peoples' 'interpretations' of community. Indeed they are attuned to these differences. As Henwood and Pidgeon point out, qualitative methods can be privileged because they meet "the problem of inappropriately fixed meanings where these are variable and renegotiable in relation to their context of use."⁷

² R. Walker, 'An introduction to applied qualitative research', in R. Walker (Ed.), *Applied Qualitative Research* (Aldershot, 1985), 18.

³ R. Walker, 'An introduction to applied qualitative research', 18.

⁴ S. Pile, 'Oral history and teaching qualitative methods', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 16 (2) (1992), 135.

⁵ S. Jones, 'Depth interviewing', in R. Walker (Ed.), *Applied Qualitative Research*, 45-6. Emphasis in original.

⁶ J. Eyles, 'Interpreting the geographical world: qualitative approaches in geographical research', in J. Eyles & D. M. Smith (Eds.), *Qualitative Methods in Human Geography* (Cambridge, 1988), 2.

⁷ K. Henwood & N. Pidgeon, 'Qualitative research and psychological theorizing', in M. Hammersley (Ed.), *Social Research: Philosophy, politics and practice* (London, 1993), 16.

Notably, qualitative techniques facilitate “the researcher ‘getting inside’ the objects of his [*sic*] study.”⁸ Then, from the resulting empathic understanding which develops,⁹ “the meaning of experience and behaviour in context and in its full complexity” can be more fully explored and understood.¹⁰ In-depth interviews, for instance, enable the researcher to “probe deeply, to uncover new clues, to open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience.”¹¹

Further, qualitative research, and Glazer and Strauss’s *grounded theory* in particular,¹² recognises that the “relationship between theory and data will at first be ill-defined.”¹³ A degree of flexibility of method is therefore permitted since, as Harari notes, too strict a methodology “can kill research instead of stimulating it and can close critical horizons instead of opening them.”¹⁴ Rather than the research process being predetermined by *a priori* theory as in traditional quantitative research, there is “constant interplay between data and conceptualization . . . between ideas and research experience.”¹⁵ Theories evolve as the research progresses, and the methodology varies in consequence. The premature closure or fixing of theory whenever new insights might arise is therefore avoided.¹⁶ In this way then, by remaining responsive to the data as far as possible, the researcher again attains the sought-after insight.¹⁷

⁸ R. Walker, ‘An introduction to applied qualitative research’, 12.

⁹ See M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe, 1949) and G. H. von Wright, ‘Two traditions’, in M. Hammersley (Ed.), *Social Research*, 12.

¹⁰ K. Henwood & N. Pidgeon, ‘Qualitative research and psychological theorising’, 16.

¹¹ R. G. Burgess, ‘The unstructured interview as a conversation’, in R. G. Burgess (Ed.), *Field Research: A sourcebook and field manual* (London, 1982), 107.

¹² See B. G. Glazer & A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (New York, 1967); and A. L. Strauss & J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques* (Newbury Park, 1990).

¹³ K. Henwood & N. Pidgeon, ‘Qualitative research and psychological theorizing’, 22.

¹⁴ J. V. Harari, ‘Preface’, in J. V. Harari (Ed.), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in post-structuralist criticism* (London, 1980), 10.

¹⁵ K. Henwood & N. Pidgeon, ‘Qualitative research and psychological theorizing’, 22.

¹⁶ See K. Henwood & N. Pidgeon, ‘Qualitative research and psychological theorizing’, 22.

¹⁷ See R. Walker, ‘An introduction to applied qualitative research’, 3.

Qualitative approaches, then, seemed ideal for the concerns of this thesis. Their proponents certainly make grand claims for their advantages. Perhaps too grand I discovered. During the conduct of this research, I do not think I ever attained the dizzy heights of empathic understanding, nor was the full complexity of the meaning of experience and behaviour ever completely within my grasp.

I also found the pursuit of Glazer and Strauss's ideal of grounded theory to be unrealistic. To constantly reassess the direction of the research in light of the data I was gathering appeared to make completion of the research impossible. Still, it remained my intention that there should be a strong interplay between data and conceptualization as the research progressed. Data gathering, naturally enough, did not occur at one moment in time influenced by a single, predetermined research strategy. Conversely, my oral and archival sources were accessed slowly and with much deliberation over the course of two and a half years. Throughout this period, the information I gathered inevitably influenced my thoughts. Some ideas were strengthened, others dissolved, and novel ones began to take shape. As a result previous sources were often re-assessed and revisited. New sources were also examined as I began to pursue the themes and ideas that had previously not attracted my interest. Many if not all of my preconceptions of the estates and their discourses of community were dispelled. Although this thesis has remained focused upon its initial broad topic, I was able to employ a looser or more realistic version of grounded theory than that proposed by Glazer and Strauss. I started with ideas of what I wanted to look at, but let them be reshaped and changed by the data.

(i) A Case Study Approach: Roehampton And Watling.

Given the adoption of a qualitative research strategy the use of intensive case study material also appeared suitable. Case studies are generally accepted as being good descriptive devices from which to illustrate the inter-related nature of the elements in a situation.¹⁸ Castells, for instance, points out that they are praised in that they permit in-depth analysis,¹⁹ and the "rich detail which emerges . . . provides

¹⁸ See R. E. Pahl, *Divisions of Labour* (Oxford, 1987), 146.

¹⁹ See M. Castells, *The City and the Grassroots* (Beverly Hills, 1983), xix-xx.

the optimum conditions for the acquisition of those illuminating insights which make formerly opaque connections suddenly pellucid.”²⁰ Furthermore, as Burgess and Mitchell note, they can yield complexly inter-related facts and information, from which theoretical principles can be abstracted.²¹ Essentially, case studies allow causal, rather than statistical, inferences to be drawn.

However, the charge frequently levelled at case studies is that they are not representative of other situations, that their findings are not generalizable. Sayer and Morgan, for instance, write that “actual concrete processes or events are produced through a combination of necessary and contingent relations and so the research findings describing these are unlikely to be generalizable to other contexts.”²² Similarly, Guba and Lincoln note that:

“Generalizations are impossible since phenomena are neither time- nor context-free (although some transferability of ... hypotheses may be possible from situation to situation, depending on the degree of temporal and contextual similarity).”²³

Yet to reject the legitimacy of a case study approach on these grounds is a fallacy.

The results that they produce are not intended to be generalizable in the same way as quantitative data.²⁴ In fact, as Denzin notes:

“The interpretivist rejects generalization as a goal and never aims to draw randomly selected samples of human experience. For the interpretivist every instance of social interaction, if thickly described, represents a slice from the life world that is the proper subject matter for interpretive inquiry. ... Every topic ... must be seen as carrying its own logic, sense of order, structure, and meaning.”²⁵

²⁰ J. C. Mitchell, ‘Case and situation analysis’, *Sociological Review* 31 (2) (1983), 207.

²¹ See R. G. Burgess, *Field Research*, 236.

²² A. Sayer & K. Morgan, ‘A modern industry in a declining region: links between method, theory and policy’, in D. Massey & R. Meegan (Eds.), *Politics and Method: Contrasting studies in industrial geography* (London, 1985), 154.

²³ E. G. Guba & Y. S. Lincoln, ‘Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry’, *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 30 (1982), 238.

²⁴ See A. Sayer & K. Morgan, ‘A modern industry in a declining region’, 153.

²⁵ N. K. Denzin, ‘Interpretive interactionism’, in G. Morgan (Ed.), *Beyond Method: Strategies for social research* (Beverly Hills, 1983), 133-4. Quoted in J. W. Schofield, ‘Increasing the generalizability of qualitative research’, in M. Hammersley (Ed.), *Social Research*, 201. For ‘thick description’ see C. Geertz, ‘Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture’, in C. Geertz (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 3-30.

So the importance of case studies lies in the conceptual ideas developed from the research. As such, it is the cogency of the studies' theoretical reasoning that is crucial for validity, not the typicality or representativeness of the case.²⁶

Bearing that in mind then, I studied two estates in Greater London: the Roehampton (Dover House) estate near Putney in south London, where construction began in 1920 and was concluded in 1927; and the Watling estate near Hendon in north London, built mainly between 1926 and 1930.²⁷ Although the increased breadth of description and understanding offered by a third case study may have been desirable, time constraints made this impractical, particularly when the intensive and prolonged care which must be devoted to studying the details of each site is considered.²⁸

In part, the choice of estates was purely pragmatic. Both estates were easily accessible to me as a researcher based in London and, perhaps more importantly, they also have large amounts of surviving archival material. As Hakim notes, when it comes to doing research based upon administrative records "opportunistic designs are almost a requirement."²⁹ In addition, however, contrasts between the estates were required so as to permit a comparative approach to further explain the underlying causal processes, structures, and agents which may have operated. A preliminary examination revealed that the rhetorics of 'community' appeared to have been much more politicised and contested in Watling than in Roehampton. Both Ruth Durant and Eileen and Stephen Yeo for instance point out conflicts between the Watling Residents' Association and the National Council of Social Service.³⁰ Yet Olechnowicz's study of the L.C.C.'s cottage estates, on the other hand, merely notes that the New Estates Community Committee of the N.C.S.S. was active in

²⁶ J. C. Mitchell, 'Case and situation analysis', 207.

²⁷ See A. A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London: Suburban development, life and transport, 1900-39* (London, 1973), 302-4.

²⁸ See J. W. Schofield, 'Increasing the generalizability of qualitative research', 212.

²⁹ C. Hakim, 'Research analysis of administrative records', in M. Hammersley (Ed.), *Social Research*, 136.

³⁰ See R. Durant, *Watling*; and E. & S. Yeo, 'On the uses of "community"'.
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Roehampton from 1936.³¹ As such then, a more subtle, sophisticated explanation of the contexts and uses of different discourses of community was possible by comparing these two estates.

C. Sources.

To construct my history and geography of Roehampton and Watling I accessed a wide range of archival sources, produced from a variety of positions and for a variety of purposes, and conducted twenty-six oral history interviews with residents and others connected to the estates. Together these allowed both the differentiation and reconstruction of the various 'discourses of community', plus a broad contextualisation of the theatres in which the dramas of life amongst the council cottages were played out. My purpose here is to detail my main archival sources, discuss the methodological implications raised by the use of local newspapers as one of these sources, and describe the procedure I adopted for the interviews.

(i) *"Vast Quantities Of Information Are Collated And Recorded By Organizations And Individuals."*³²

Unsurprisingly for a study concerning the inter-war period, a large proportion of my sources were archival material, consisting of a variety of historical records, documents, local newspapers, and so forth. I have already noted that relevant material is plentiful for both Roehampton and Watling. More importantly, however, these materials have also been produced by a variety of different institutions and personalities, and therefore reflect a variety of viewpoints. Not least, insights into life upon the estates were provided from all three of the viewpoints I was initially concerned with - although those of the Community Association movement and of the Tenants' and Residents' Associations were most evident in the written record. It

³¹ See A. Olechnowicz, 'The economic and social development of inter-war out-county municipal housing estates, with special reference to the London County Council's Becontree and Dagenham estate', 269.

³² C. Hakim, 'Research analysis of administrative records', 131.

must also be stressed, however, that other archives and viewpoints were also available and explored – for instance those of the London County Council and the Communist Party of Great Britain. This was in line with my interpretation of grounded theory. My initial appraisal of life upon Roehampton and Watling had suggested examination of the former sources. My determination to ensure that I did not overlook a more rewarding understanding of life upon the estates required thorough examination of the latter. Some of these latter sources were predetermined and intended to provide an overview of estate life, with the potential to suggest additional interesting lines of enquiry. Others (notably the Communist Party) were investigated because the progressing research demanded their investigation.

The values, aims, and activities of the Community Association movement on the estates were examined from several angles. The British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics holds an extensive collection of the literature published by the bodies associated with the movement, in particular the National Council of Social Service and the various local Councils of Social Service that it established. Journals included in this collection, for instance, are *The Social Service Review*, *Partnership in Social Effort*, *The Flowing Tide*, and *Community*. These contain reports of conferences, speeches and general articles on matters of importance to the bodies and individuals concerned. They provide an overview of the activities of the movement and also highlight their way of thinking about community in general and about community on the new estates in particular. For a more localised view of their activities on the specific estates of Roehampton and Watling I have used the records of the London County Council at the Greater London Record Office. There, files dedicated specifically to Roehampton and Watling detailed the formation, or attempted formation, of Community Associations on the two estates. Included, for instance, were the minutes of meetings and the large amounts of correspondence involving the leading actors of the L.C.C., the Community Association movement and the estates' Tenants' and Residents' Associations. These files provided a wide yet detailed picture of what was happening, and why, at the local level. In the case of Watling, this material was further supplemented by the journal that was produced on the estate by the

Community Association there - *The Watling Resident*. Copies of this are available at both the British Newspaper Library and the Local Studies and Archives Unit of Hendon Library. This allowed insights into what the Association was doing on the estate, why it was doing it, what its ideal of community was, and how popular it was with the tenants.

To examine the Tenants' Association on Roehampton and Residents' Association on Watling a variety of sources were used. One of these was again the journals produced by the Associations: *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (copies of which are held at Wandsworth Local History Library) and, while it was still produced by the Residents' Association, *The Watling Resident*. Again these were complemented by L.C.C. records at the Greater London Record Office, detailing both the Associations' activities and their relationships with the London County Council. Between them these sources provided materials for understanding the conceptions of community propounded by the Associations, their nature and activities upon the estates, and a sense of the everyday life and history of the estate both in itself and as presented by and to the residents.

General archival sources of central and local government activities were also studied. At the Greater London Record Office, for instance, files were examined to ascertain the L.C.C.'s perspective on issues such as the planning and layout of the estates, the allocation of houses and the selection of tenants. These were issues that I believed might influence the residents' ideas about community on their estates. Records concerning the general management of the estates, such as instructions given to tenants in the rent book, were also examined to see if they demonstrated any L.C.C. expectations, or concerns, for the estates and their residents that could reflect upon their attitude to the aims and activities of the Community Association movement. Similar central government records were examined at the Public Record Office for the same reason. As I have stressed above these sources also provided a general overview of life upon the estates.

My sense of the everyday life and history of Watling was further enhanced by a reading of Ruth Durant's book and a later study of the estate.³³ It was clear however that, like many of my sources, these books were in themselves part of a certain discourse of community and therefore required considered interpretation.

During my examination of these various sources (and the local newspapers discussed below) a theme repeatedly drawn to my attention was the relevance of communists to life upon the estates. To examine this further I visited both the Marx Memorial Library in London and the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester, which holds the archives of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Neither were able to enlighten me about Communist activities on the inter-war council estates in general nor Roehampton or Watling in particular. By returning to the initial sources and gathering more details, however, I was able to piece together enough information to examine their importance to the developing estates.

Newspapers produced by and for the areas surrounding Roehampton and Watling also offered significant insights into events and happenings on the two estates. For Roehampton I used the *Wandsworth Borough News* and *The Richmond Herald* (both available from the British Newspaper Library and Wandsworth Local History Library). For Watling this involved the *Hendon and Finchley Times* (available from the British Newspaper Library and Hendon Reference Library, and later to be known as the *Hendon Times and Guardian*, and then the *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*). In common with all news reporting, however, the pages and columns of these newspapers were far from neutral sources. The world of the press is not the real world, but a world skewed and judged.³⁴ The following section is concerned to elaborate on the bias present within news reporting and the methodological implications it raised for the research.

³³ E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, *Watling Community Association: The first twenty-one years* (London, 1949).

³⁴ R. Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (London, 1991), 11.

(ii) *Making The News.*

My use of newspapers as one source of information for this thesis was governed by the knowledge that they do not provide an impartial and undistorted view of what was happening on Roehampton and Watling. In short, there was a problem of bias within their coverage, a bias endemic to news reporting in general. As Philo puts it:

“‘News’ on television and in the Press is not self-defining. News is not ‘found’ or even ‘gathered’ so much as made. It is a *creation* of a journalistic process, an artifact, a commodity even.”³⁵

The purpose of this section is to detail how news is created, and biased, and how this affected my assessment and use of what the newspapers were saying about the two estates. Most of what happens in the world, I argue, is never reported. Only a selection of events are ever presented as news. It is this partial view that immediately introduces an element of bias into news reporting. Journalists’ and editors’ choices of which events to report as news reflect not the intrinsic importance of those events, but the operation of a complex and artificial process of selection. To appreciate the construction of news and bias within newspapers, it is the process of selection that needs to be understood.

Selection begins with the news-gathering strategies of the newspapers. As Hall and Rock have shown, production schedules ensure that journalists monitor only a selection of proven sources of ‘news’ because of the need for a regular and plentiful supply of copy.³⁶ These include local authorities, the courts, the police, political parties and non-commercial organisations.³⁷ The central characteristic of these sources and institutions is that they represent official authority and/or financial power.

“They are *established* by official authority, by social status or by commercial success; they are *organised*, with a bureaucratic structure which embodies

³⁵ G. Philo, ‘Bias in the media’, in D. Coates & G. Johnston (Eds), *Socialist Arguments* (Oxford, 1983), 135. Emphasis in the original.

³⁶ S. Hall, ‘The social production of news’, in S. Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke & B. Roberts (Eds), *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London, 1978), 57-8; P. Rock, ‘News as eternal recurrence’, in S. Cohen & J. Young (Eds), *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media* (London, 1973), 73-80.

³⁷ B. Whitaker, *News Limited: Why You Can’t Read All About It* (London, 1981), 31-2.

spokespersons, and a regular scheduling of statements; and they have the *resources* to pay for publicity and public relations.”³⁸

The activities and views of the less privileged however typically receive no such favoured access to the Press. They may appear in newsprint only if they are arrested by the police and then gaoled by the courts, for instance. There is therefore an imbalance between the representation in the newspapers of the privileged and unprivileged. The initial selection of news sources can neglect to report the assertions, activities and attitudes of significant sections of society. It is the views of the official, powerful and rich that are accessed and reproduced, legitimating the status quo.³⁹

This, Fowler argues, is a situation reinforced by the commercial basis of most newspaper publications. Newspapers are businesses and their activities and output are partially determined by considerations this raises. Not least there is the need to be profitable. Most especially therefore, support for trade unionism or socialism within newspapers is generally limited.

“The Press is bound to be preoccupied with the ogres of socialism and trade unionism, and to condemn them, because the interests of socialism and of organised labour are experienced as antagonistic to the business of making money.”⁴⁰

This was however an argument made in the 1980s. As the press of the late 1990s illustrates, newspaper support for particular brands of socialism can not be entirely ruled out.

Beyond supporting industrial-capitalist society and privileging the voices and actions of the elite and powerful, the selection of events to become the news in the next edition is further governed by a complex set of criteria of newsworthiness. News is not just that which happens, but that which can be regarded and presented as newsworthy.⁴¹ The criteria by which this is judged are generally referred to as ‘news values’. Their effect is to filter and restrict news input, with an event more likely to be reported if it satisfies a high number of newsworthiness criteria. Galtung and

³⁸ R. Fowler, *Language in the News*, 22. Emphasis in the original.

³⁹ R. Fowler, *Language in the News*, 22-3.

⁴⁰ R. Fowler, *Language in the News*, 20.

⁴¹ R. Fowler, *Language in the News*, 13.

Ruge have identified twelve major criteria of newsworthiness. These include factors such as the frequency of the news event, its unexpectedness, and any reference that it contains to elite nations.⁴² In assessing the construction of news, an essential feature of these and other criteria of newsworthiness is the extent to which they are socially constructed.

Galtung and Ruge acknowledge that this is the case in four of the factors they identify. They stress that the factors 'reference to elite nations', 'reference to elite people', 'reference to persons', and 'reference to something negative' are "culture-bound factors influencing the transition from events to news."⁴³ For instance, the socially constructed nature of 'reference to elite people' as a determinant of news is apparent in media preoccupation with notable paradigms, most especially royalty. Similarly, 'reference to elite nations' reflects the dominance attributed to the role of North America, Europe, Russia, and increasingly the Pacific Rim within global political, economic and cultural affairs. 'Reference to persons' as a criterion of news is also arbitrary. It is used because it enables the media to promote straightforward feelings of identification, empathy or disapproval; to represent complex historical and institutional processes, but to do so simply; and to ease the editing of lengthy narratives. The artificial nature of such 'personalization' as a measure of what is or what is not news is evident not least in its varied application between newspapers. The newsworthiness of negativity is clearly value-laden too. The comparative reluctance of the media to report not just bad news, but successes and good news as well can readily be questioned.⁴⁴ Fowler emphasises that most of Galtung and Ruge's other eight selection criteria for newsworthiness are also cultural rather than natural. Especially the criterion of 'meaningfulness'. With sub-sections of 'cultural proximity' and 'relevance', this is a criterion founded, he argues, upon an ideology of homocentrism. The reporting of events as news is influenced by a:

⁴² J. Galtung & M. Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', in S. Cohen & J. Young (Eds), *The Manufacture of News*, 62-72.

⁴³ J. Galtung & M. Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', 66.

⁴⁴ R. Fowler, *Language in the News*, 15-6.

“Preoccupation with countries, societies and individuals perceived to be like oneself; with boundaries; with defining ‘groups’ felt to be unlike oneself, alien, threatening.”⁴⁵

A common result is the presentation of dichotomous visions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ to the newspaper readers.

Susan Smith’s work indicates how such criteria of newsworthiness can affect the reporting of crime in local newspapers. Intentionally, crime reporting reflects neither the frequency nor the character of known offences. “Crime,” she notes, “is easy news, and the most serious (and therefore sensational) crimes, which occur least frequently, are most ‘newsworthy’.” Violent personal crimes, for instance, occur only infrequently, yet dominate crime reporting. More common crimes such as burglary are less newsworthy and receive less press coverage. In this example, newsworthiness depends upon both the infrequency and negativity of the event, and the image presented within the newspaper is not a full and accurate reflection of events in the real world.⁴⁶

News values then should be seen as ‘intersubjective mental categories’ to which the media make reference when determining the significance of events. In effect, they are stereotypes. Such stereotypes are similarly referred to by the audience of the media when they make sense of what is presented to them as news. As such, the formation of news values and the construction of news events must be seen to involve not just the media, but the audience too. The stereotypes of newsworthiness are the result of negotiation between these two groups. Journalists and editors aiming to present their readers with news draw upon, and reinforce, the cultural stereotypes of those readers when selecting events to feature in the next issue. The formation of news events and the formation of news values, therefore, is part of a reciprocal dialectical process between the media and its audience.

⁴⁵ R. Fowler, *Language in the News*, 16.

⁴⁶ S. Smith, *Crime, Space and Society* (Cambridge, 1986), 118; S. Smith, ‘Crime in the news’, *British Journal of Criminology* 24 (1984), 289-95; & S. Smith, ‘News and the dissemination of fear’, in J. Burgess & J. Gold (Eds), *Geography, The Media and Popular Culture* (London, 1985), 229-53.

“The occurrence of a striking event will reinforce a stereotype, and, reciprocally, the firmer the stereotype, the more likely are relevant events to become news.”⁴⁷

The construction of news is determined then in several ways. Typical news gathering strategies and the frequent commercial basis of news reporting organisations can act to ensure that what is presented as news is both favourable to the privileged sections of society and supportive of industrial capitalism. It is also the case that:

“The media do not simply and transparently report events which are ‘naturally’ newsworthy *in themselves*. ‘News’ is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories.”⁴⁸

These are categories constructed according to, in simple terms, the cultural stereotypes of both the press and its audience.

My use of the *Hendon and Finchley Times*, *Wandsworth Borough News* and *Richmond Herald* as sources for this research therefore raised certain methodological implications. Firstly, a healthy scepticism was employed in my reading of the newspapers. The newspapers were assumed to report only a partial picture of life upon the estates and to present that picture from a particular angle. Secondly, it was also necessary to bear in mind a knowledge of the sociology of the newspapers and their audiences in order to appreciate that angle. The events on Watling and Roehampton selected to be reported as news would be dependent upon the social, economic and political circumstances in which both the institutions of news reporting and presentation and their readers were situated.

In short, the newspapers were produced for the suburbanites of the genteel districts of Hendon, Mill Hill and Finchley, and Putney, Sheen, Wimbledon and Richmond that surrounded the Watling and Roehampton estates. These were true blue Conservative voting areas. At the very least, these people were members of London’s middle classes. Circulation figures are not readily available to provide an indication of the newspapers’ distribution and significance to this audience. However, residents of both estates did remark that they were the newspapers that

⁴⁷ R. Fowler, *Language in the News*, 17.

⁴⁸ S. Hall, ‘The social production of news’, 53. Emphasis in the original.

people read. Detailed information concerning the ownership of the newspapers is also lacking. All the newspapers were owned and produced by local families. *The Hendon and Finchley Times* was owned by a Mr. Bill Warden. Beyond this, details are scarce. It is not unreasonable to suggest, however, that there was little to separate the newspapers' mainly middle-class and Conservative readers from their owners. The manner in which this affected the selection and reporting of events on the estates is clearly demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five.

(iii) *"If You Want An Answer, Ask A Question."*⁴⁹

Although the archives listed above provided a substantial amount of information relating to the varying discourses of community and the broader contexts in which these were set, to fully understand the estate residents' conceptualizations of this term there was no substitute for their own words. Moving out of the record office into the living room, the researcher is able to talk to people about their experiences and share, at least to some extent, their understandings.⁵⁰

Sue Jones, for instance, writes:

"To understand other persons' constructions of reality we would do well to ask them (rather than assume we can know merely by observing their overt behaviour) and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms (rather than those imposed rigidly and *a priori* by ourselves) and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings (rather than through isolated fragments squeezed onto a few lines of paper)."⁵¹

Moreover, whereas the "nature of most existing records is to reflect the standpoint of authority,"⁵² oral history - "the evocation and recording of individual memories of the past"⁵³ - provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction by drawing on the experiences of those not usually represented in their own terms in the established

⁴⁹ M. D. Shipman, *The limitations of social research* (London, 1972), 76.

⁵⁰ See Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: Theory, politics, method', in R. Johnson, G. McLennan, B. Schwarz, & D. Sutton (Eds.), *Making Histories: Studies in history-writing and politics* (Minneapolis, 1982), 222.

⁵¹ S. Jones, 'Depth interviewing', 46. Emphasis in original.

⁵² P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral history* (Oxford, 1988), 6.

⁵³ Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: Theory, politics, method', 216.

account.⁵⁴ As its advocates claim, “oral history makes available a new and untapped source in the testimony of living people.”⁵⁵ In addition to the archival research, I therefore also conducted in-depth and semi-structured oral history interviews. The methodology here was somewhat more complex than requesting a file from the archives of the L.C.C. and then waiting for it to be delivered. As such, I wish to give a detailed description of the procedure I adopted.

I have interviewed, in the main, surviving residents from each estate, and in doing so explored the informal, everyday discourses of community that are perhaps least accessible through the archival sources. At the same time, however, the residents were also able to give me an insight into the discourses of community of the Tenants’ Association on Roehampton and the Community Association on Watling through their views and accounts of the activities of the groups and personalities concerned. In using this testimony I have followed Paul Thompson’s suggestion that “what matters is the *direct* personal experience that someone has, rather than their formal position.”⁵⁶ Moreover, some of my interviewees had also been, to varying degrees, active within these organisations and were therefore able to further increase my depth of understanding.

Three of my interviewees had not been tenants upon the estates. Although it had not been my intention to interview people who had lived off Roehampton and Watling, the opportunity did arise. In one case, I spoke to a former Watling Estate Clerk who was able to comment upon the L.C.C. perspective on some of the issues upon the estate. In the other two cases, near neighbours of Watling and Roehampton provided their opinions of happenings on the estates. In total twenty-six oral history interviews were carried out (see Appendix One for details of the interviewees).

To find a willing supply of interviewees, I initially contacted by letter day care centre managers, wardens of ‘retirement’ homes and local pensioners’ organisations explaining the broad aims of my research and the people I needed to

⁵⁴ See P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 6.

⁵⁵ Popular Memory Group, ‘Popular Memory: Theory, politics, method’, 222.

⁵⁶ P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 188. Emphasis in original.

speak to. This was then followed by a telephone call to see if they could actually help.⁵⁷ This was a particularly intensive form of 'interviewee recruitment'. Over forty such 'institutions' were contacted, which resulted in six constructive interviews. Although I was introduced to more than this number of people, one was unfortunately too old to recall much, while others had not lived on, or even near, the estates at all.⁵⁸ It is possible that I had not made it completely clear who I would like to talk to. There was also, however, the possibility that I was seen as an opportunity for some reminiscence therapy.

Some greater success was achieved by writing to the more limited number of local churches on and around the estates, who either suggested people I could contact or put a note about my research in their newsletters. Again, the constructive response to this was six interviews. In these I do not include the former MI5 operative who refused to talk about his activities in the inter-war period, but did so anyway.

Most success resulted from letters in the free, local newspapers delivered on the estates. In these I just asked for residents with a story to tell about life on the estates in the inter-war period to get in touch with me. There was also a slight 'snowball effect' with residents recommending me to their friends, and also the Roehampton Garden Society placing a note about me in their newsletter after I had spoken to one of their members.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the residents' homes and most of them on a one-to-one basis. I had originally intended to avoid group situations because of the supposed:

"Complexity of group dynamics, the dangers of failures in group leadership, and the difficulties in analysing the data that they provide."⁵⁹

In a few cases, however, the residents invited friends who had also lived on the estate to come along as well. This was welcomed as I found they could stimulate each other to talk much more easily than I could. Given the interviewees' permission, all

⁵⁷ See S. Pile, 'Oral history and teaching qualitative methods' for a similar methodology.

⁵⁸ I have not included these 'interviews' within the total of twenty-six in Appendix One.

⁵⁹ S. Pile, 'Depth hermeneutics and critical human geography', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 8 (2) (1990), 217.

the interviews were tape recorded using a portable cassette recorder with built-in microphone. None of the interviewees had any great problem with this, particularly after the first few minutes when any initial inhibitions had passed. I had also assured each person I spoke to that they had the final word on whether or not I could use extracts from the interviews, and also on whether or not I would use their real names. The residents were only too willing to have their histories told.

The interviews can perhaps be described as semi-structured in that I envisaged my role as being to listen and probe. I had thought out in advance areas that needed to be covered and had noted these down, but I did not have a formal set of questions. Sitting in the interviewees' homes, I was relatively happy to let them lead the conversation. Although I approached the interviews with a broad agenda of topics to discuss, I was not set upon limiting my discussion to that agenda. Moreover, there was no particular order or phrasing to my questions, and there were none that had to be asked if they appeared irrelevant. I did not wish to lose the "possibilities of freedom and flexibility for researchers and narrators alike" that the spontaneous exchange within the interview offered.⁶⁰ As Anderson and Jack note:

"Realizing the possibilities of the oral history interview demands a shift in methodology from information gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint."⁶¹

Having said this, however, if the discussion did move completely away from the *inter-war period* into areas of little value to *my* concerns, I did attempt to re-direct it somewhat.

"The crucial point is that there is no such thing as pre-suppositionless research. In preparing for interviews researchers will have, and should have, some broad questions in mind. ... The process of interviewing is one in which researchers are continually making choices, based on their research interests and prior theories, about which data they want to pick up and explore further with respondents and those which they do not."⁶²

In spite of my informal approach to the interviews and desire to let the residents discuss the relevant issues as they saw them, it was still inevitable that my

⁶⁰ K. Anderson & D. C. Jack, 'Learning to listen', 11.

⁶¹ K. Anderson & D. C. Jack, 'Learning to listen', 23.

⁶² S. Jones, 'Depth interviewing', 45.

position was not that of a neutral, passive observer, but of an active participant in the conversation with at least some bearing upon the responses of the interviewees. Some reflection is called for therefore upon my own role within the interviews. Firstly, it was clear that the questions I asked and the way I asked those questions could crucially affect the information I was given. This was inevitable for although I was generally happy for the residents to lead the discussion, the only way not to influence their responses would have been to remain totally silent. To minimise the impacts of my interjections into the conversation, I adopted several strategies. My first technique was to be vague, although not misleading, about my specific research interests so as not to encourage respondents' preconceptions of what I wanted to hear. Jones hints that this is a useful interview tactic.

“The researchers are more likely to get good data, and know what data they are getting, if the interviewees are told at the outset what the research topic is, even if initially in broad terms.”

I was particularly careful not to mention or explain the centrality of community to my concerns because to do so would have undoubtedly suggested to the interviewees certain themes to concentrate on, and possibly particular responses I may have liked to hear. This would have made a nonsense of the objectives of the interviews – I wanted the residents to explain to me in their own terms what life on Roehampton and Watling was like in the 1920s and 1930s. At the beginning of the interviews therefore I typically explained in very general terms that the estates and their residents were interesting to me because they had been such a novel feature of the inter-war years. This was the first time that council estates had ever been built for substantial numbers of the population and I wanted to know what were they like to live on. Typically, it was difficult for me to finish saying this and start the tape recorder before the residents had already begun to talk about when they moved to the estates, where from, how old they were, what it was like, how it compared to their previous homes, whether or not they liked it, and so forth.

The interview underway, the second of my strategies was to sometimes say as little as possible. My desire to let the residents have their own say has already been stressed, but I did find it a remarkably effective interviewing technique. Staying silent rather than jumping in with my next question or my own point of view

frequently served two purposes. Without the need for me to prompt or probe and unduly influence their responses, a short silence could encourage the residents to elaborate upon their previous topic or embark of their own accord upon their next. I did appreciate however that an excessive number of pauses would prove both uncomfortable and tiring to the residents and was not conducive to a successful interview. The technique was not used to extremes therefore.

Thirdly, if it was at all possible I avoided being the first to mention community during the interview. The residents could typically be relied upon to take the initiative after discussing, for instance, what relations were like with their neighbours, what social activities there were, did they join any clubs, what were the shops and school like, how the estate compared with their previous homes, or how did it compare with it today? My sole input in such cases was to occasionally ask them to clarify their views of community after they had finished talking about it. For instance, 'Sorry, I missed a bit there, tell me again, why was the estate a community?' This was an approach that enabled the residents to broach the subject, define the term and its meanings, and muse over whether or not it was there with a minimum of prompting by me.

On occasions, however, unsolicited discourse upon community was not forthcoming. This was one notable instance of Glazer and Strauss's ideal of grounded theory proving difficult to implement. Community was central to my concerns, but seemingly unimportant to certain residents. Grounded theory would suggest pursuing the issues the residents did feel were important. If it appeared fruitful, I did so. But I also pursued my own interests in the concept of community. To do so, I would wait until all other topics had been discussed and the residents appeared to have little else to add, before popping the question, 'Do you think the estate was a community?' This would then typically be followed by questions such as 'Why was the estate a community?', 'Was anything important to the sense of community?', or 'Why do you think there was no sense of community?' Such questions were relatively neutral and value-free. Leading and loaded questions on the other hand were avoided. They would have suggested to the interviewees particular responses. For instance, it was not my approach to say, "So the estate was

a community then? What about a neighbourly feeling, did that help a sense of community?”, or “I guess there was no community here because there was no pub, is that right?”, or “Were there any good sides to estate life, like a strong sense of community for instance?” Similarly, I also avoided questions that attempted to summarise the residents (or perhaps my) views. For instance, questions along the line of “So it was the garden society and violin recitals that made the estate a community then, that’s right isn’t it?” were not asked.

In short, I preferred to let the residents tell me in their own words and own time their views upon community, with a minimum of prompting from me. When this was not possible, my questions were intended to be as neutral and value-free as possible. My aim was not to install preconceptions in the minds of the interviewees about either the centrality of community to my concerns or what I wanted to hear about it. Still, it remained impossible for my questions not to have an effect on the nature of the interview and the interviewees’ responses. After the interviews, the tapes of the conversations were therefore transcribed as fully as possible, “like the text of a play.”⁶³ With upwards of fifty hours of conversation this was a lengthy and tedious process, but it enabled me to appreciate my effects on what the residents had said and also helped me to place their more important comments within the context of the preceding discussion so as to not misunderstand their meaning.

In addition to the obvious effect of my particular questions upon the responses of the interviewees, it was also the case that the information I received depended a great deal upon my presence and the social relations of the interviews.

“The social situation created by the interview does not simply constitute an obstacle to the respondent’s articulation of his or her beliefs. Like speech events in general, it shapes the form and content of what is said.”⁶⁴

This was evident to me in several ways. The dynamics of the interview situation were influenced at the outset by my introduction of myself as a student from the University of London who would be writing a PhD about how they used to live. Complex power relationships arose from this. Initially at least, the majority of residents, I feel, deferred to me as the academic researcher. Fears were frequently

⁶³ S. Pile, ‘Depth hermeneutics and critical human geography’, 218-9.

⁶⁴ C. Briggs, *Learning How to Ask* (Cambridge, 1986), 122.

expressed that they had nothing of any interest to tell me, or that it was of little academic value, or that I must already be aware of what they were going to say. Yet during the course of the interviews the relationships typically shifted in favour of the residents as it became more apparent that I was very interested in what they had to tell me and was neither (openly) dubious nor critical of their opinions and versions of events. By the end of the interview, the residents' expectations and interpretations of what the interview should be about had often changed substantially.

Amongst other aspects of my role within the interviews, my position as a young, middle-class, university-educated male was central. For instance, both male and female residents of the estates frequently compared our respective positions. They too would have liked to have gone to college, or have had 'better' jobs, or at least have had the opportunity to work outside the home. At other times, the men expected me to understand and share their point of view, whilst the women believed that perhaps I could or would not. Occasionally, the perception was that I was also too young to understand. My purpose here is not to appear narcissistic, but to indicate some of the ways in which the interview setting and relationship was constructed, and highlight how this affected the histories generated through the interviews. I clearly influenced the ways in which the interviewees reacted to me, and vice-versa, affecting both what was said and how it was said.

The informal nature of my approach to the interviews helped, I believe, to reduce these impacts of the interview setting. As Ann Oakley notes:

"The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical."⁶⁵

To further establish this, it was also always my intention that the interviews be "conducted in a safe, friendly, supportive atmosphere."⁶⁶ If the plates of biscuits, sandwiches and cakes, together with the cups of tea and cans of beer (sherry was declined), I received, and the numerous invitations to come back again if I had forgotten anything, is any measure, then I think I was reasonably successful.

⁶⁵ A. Oakley, 'Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms', in M. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (London, 1981), 41.

⁶⁶ K. Anderson & D. C. Jack, 'Learning to listen: interview techniques and analyses', in S. B. Gluck & D. Patai (Eds.), *Women's Words: The feminist practice of oral history* (London, 1991), 11.

However, it was undoubtedly still the case that the research alliance and the interview situation did affect the material I was given. This could not be ignored.

“By failing to consider the effects of the interview situation on responses we circumvent the vital process of examining our own contribution to the generation of the data.”⁶⁷

After each interview therefore various unspoken elements of the interview were recorded. These included the physical setting for the interview (such as pub, resident’s kitchen or nursing home), the general atmosphere of the meeting and the apparent willingness and enthusiasm of the interviewee to confide. Similarly, any reluctance of the interviewee to discuss certain topics was noted, together with body language (as far as I was able to discern). My own reactions, presuppositions and attitudes to the respondent were also recorded.

During analysis and interpretation of the interviews therefore I was able to take account of not simply the effect of what I said (recorded in the interview transcripts), but also the overall context of the interview setting and our own unspoken attitudes and relationship. This was crucial in establishing not just what the residents said and how they said it, but also why they said it.⁶⁸

It has been pointed out to me that in interviewing people who had lived on the estates for their whole lives there was the possibility that I had been talking to people who had grown into ‘the ethos’ of the estates, and that perhaps I had been given a rose-tinted view of the past.⁶⁹ This, however, I feel was avoided on two counts. First, not all of the residents I spoke to were still living on Roehampton or Watling. Second, one of the advantages of the informal interview setting was the option of simply asking people to elaborate on any point that I thought might be coloured in this way.⁷⁰ One of the basic advantages of oral history is that researchers

⁶⁷ C. Briggs, *Learning How to Ask*, 124.

⁶⁸ Thanks to Jessica Allen for all her advice here. See J. Allen, ‘Contested understandings: the Lansbury Estate in the post-war period’, unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, 1994).

⁶⁹ Thanks to Humphrey Southall for mentioning this when I presented a paper. ‘Contested Concepts of Community on Inter-War Cottage Council Estates’. Paper presented at the Department of Geography, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 6.6.95.

⁷⁰ See S. Pile, ‘Oral history and teaching qualitative methods’, 140.

are able to question stereotyped and non-committal generalizations. Paul Thompson notes:

“You may be told, as a general comment, that ‘we helped each other out’, ‘we were all one big family in the street’, but if you ask a specific question such as who outside the family helped when the mother was ill, it may become clear that neighbourly aid was less a practice than an ideal.”⁷¹

Such specific questions did often need to be asked, rarely did the replies confirm Thompson’s cynicism, however.

On a few occasions my interviewees wrote to me about aspects of life on the estates, either before or after the interviews. I was also sent a letter from a resident who had left Roehampton to live in Devon, but had kept in contact with the estate’s Garden Society. I did not interview her as by then I had sufficient material for my purposes. All these letters were kept and at times referred to, along with the one postal questionnaire I sent out to a former resident of Watling who did not have time to see me.

D. Analysis And Interpretation.

I discovered that collecting the ‘data’ for this thesis as outlined above was a relatively simple part of the research. Although it was a lengthy and time-consuming process, the procedure was relatively straightforward. My problems began when it was time to analyse and interpret the material I had collected - to examine the discourses of community upon the estates. Yet, Said’s work on *Orientalism* had made the analysis of discourse sound so easy:⁷²

“This work tended to characterise imperial knowledge as a fairly homogenous form of information that was relatively ‘transparent’ to the reader and therefore simple to analyze.”⁷³

It is perhaps necessary to discuss the theoretical reasoning behind the analysis of discourse.

⁷¹ P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 201.

⁷² E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1985).

⁷³ S. Mills, ‘Knowledge, gender, and empire’, in A. Blunt & G. Rose (Eds), *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and postcolonial geographies* (New York, 1994), 29.

As noted in the previous chapter, work on discourse has suggested that “words and their meanings can differ according to the social relations and the institutional settings within which they are produced, reproduced and sometimes reshaped.”⁷⁴ The first step in the analysis of discourse, then, involves considering not simply the content of the text, “but its author (who says it?), its authority (on what grounds?), its audience (to whom?), its object (about whom?), [and] its objective (in order to achieve what?).”⁷⁵ Essentially, discourse analysis argues that texts need to be interpreted in their full contexts since “the understanding of a text consists first of all of placing it in its proper socio-political configuration in having the text confront its historical context.”⁷⁶

Further, however, the concern with social relations and institutional settings also focuses attention on the “relationship between documents and social structure, class relations, social control, social order, ideology and power.”⁷⁷ In particular, this is demonstrated in Said’s *Orientalism*, which draws on the earlier work of Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and Raymond Williams. Firstly, Said suggests that by examining discursive formations it is possible to reveal the power relations those discourses are used to support. All discourses are concerned with particular objects and they propose certain concepts whilst marginalising others. Specific topics are included for consideration, whilst others are excluded. An examination of discourse, then, involves questioning how the totality of meanings it contains may serve to control, dominate, include, and exclude.⁷⁸ Furthermore, as Macdonell notes, a discourse takes effect, both directly and indirectly, in terms of its position relative

⁷⁴ V. Jupp & C. Norris, ‘Traditions in documentary analysis’, in M. Hammersley (Ed), *Social Research*, 47.

⁷⁵ A. Worrall, *Offending women: Female law-breakers and the criminal justice system* (London, 1990), 9.

⁷⁶ J. V. Harari, ‘Critical factions/critical fictions’, in J. V. Harari (Ed.), *Textual strategies*, 45.

⁷⁷ V. Jupp & C. Norris, ‘Traditions in documentary analysis’, 39.

⁷⁸ See E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 3. In my understanding of how Said’s method can be adopted to other contexts I have been guided by R. Woodward, ‘Saving Spitalfields: The politics of opposition to redevelopment in East London’, unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, 1991), 16-7; and J. Allen, ‘Contested understandings’, 61.

to another discourse.⁷⁹ With the aid of discourse analysis therefore it is possible to ascertain how each discursive construction relates to others.

Secondly, Said's work suggests that it is necessary to identify within discursive constructions the representations of material and social entities that are constructed as a means to an end. Not only can discourses include and exclude, they can also name things as they see fit. In carrying out discourse analysis it is necessary to realise that there is no definitive 'truth' about an object, but rather representations of that object.⁸⁰ Sets of statements concerning an object reflect a set of meanings. If these are examined then they show a purpose behind them. They show a set of arguments about the purpose of that object.⁸¹ In this research the 'object' that is created within the discourses under consideration is 'community'. By looking at different discourses I aimed to show how they represented that object - community - in different ways. This required an awareness and sensitivity towards language because language uses numerous methods to represent objects.

Having established the socio-political configuration, or context, in which discourses are produced and consumed, the crucial part of discourse analysis is to scrutinise the materials through which they are presented - which may, in this case, be interview transcripts, newspaper accounts, or official reports - in order to establish how meanings, positions, and assumptions are constructed and conveyed. Geertz, for instance, argues that appeals to common and shared understandings are conveyed by the type and style of rhetoric, figures of speech, and common-sense appeals.⁸² Similarly, Said notes, "the things in the text to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, [and] narrative devices."⁸³

In the light of Said's work, therefore, my aim was to identify both the sites of confrontation between the various discourses of community, and the construction of representations and images within these discourses. In simple terms this was to be undertaken by examination of both the ways in which positions and arguments were

⁷⁹ See D. Macdonell, *Theories of discourse*, 3.

⁸⁰ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

⁸¹ See E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 71.

⁸² See C. Geertz, *Local knowledge* (New York, 1983)

⁸³ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

proposed and expounded and the ways in which the messages, representations, and arguments were delivered. The material could then be represented in such a way as to enable the representations of community constructed by different groups to be more readily apparent. The theory was simple.

Practice proved otherwise. Faced with the ungainly and daunting amount of material that I had amassed over the course of thirty months, it was not immediately apparent to me if there were any particular discourses of community to begin writing about. I was unable to see whether there were any sites of confrontation between different discourses. So to identify where they may have been sited and examine the ways in which messages, representations and arguments were delivered seemed a little unrealistic. To make the process easier, it was necessary to categorise and code the material. As I have emphasised above, during the period of data collection I did debate with myself the directions the thesis was taking or would take and remained alert to new possibilities. There had been little to suggest however that there was a more constructive approach than to focus upon community as seen through the eyes of the estates' residents, their tenants' associations, and the Community Association movement. With this in mind, I therefore chose to code the material initially according to which of the groups it related to. For instance, an interview transcript could contain references to the life left behind following the move to the estate, the new neighbours, and the absence of a pub. These would often be placed in the category of 'Residents'. On the other hand, references to the fête organised by the residents' association would be categorised under the heading of 'Residents' Association'. Material relating to the Community Association movement, for instance health lectures held at the community centre, was grouped together as 'Community Association' material. Different coloured highlighter pens and the 'cut and paste' functions of a word processing package were the main tools for this process.

Such a basic coding process did not sufficiently structure the data to enable the identification of discourses of community. Further coding and categorisation were required. For instance, the material grouped under the broad category of 'Residents' was examined to see if themes such as relations with neighbours, forms

of social activity that occurred on the estates, and help offered to or by others displayed any degree of pattern, similarity or difference in relation to notions of community that had been expressed. The material relating to either the 'Residents' Association' category or the 'Community Association' category was assessed to see what sort of people were involved with the bodies, what they and the organisations did and why, and what, if anything, 'community' had to do with it. Notable themes permeating the data and connecting to the notion of community now began to take shape and provide further criteria to code the material by. These were not themes that I had settled upon in advance. Certainly some had been suggested by my earlier reviews of literature (the theme of mutuality, for instance), but the majority occurred to me either during the collection of the data (most notably themes of respectability and morality), or during the coding process itself (especially public sociability and privacy). My analysis was far from determined by any preconceptions. It was driven by findings emerging from the wide and varied sources of data.

This degree of coding, sub-division and structuring of the data (which although often intuitive, was not as straightforward as it sounds) enabled me to begin to identify different discourses of community. As Said's work suggested, it was the differences between the various discourses that first became apparent. These tended to broadly define the boundaries of the discourses in contrast to one another. For instance, various discourses of community could be distinguished through general differences between both the estates and the different groups in terms of the significance attributed to notions of respectability, morality, neighbourliness, public sociability and mutuality. Subsequent to this, the more subtle details and internal elements of the individual discourses were also uncovered in terms of the activities and practices upon which such over-riding sentiments of community were dependent. The importance of respectability to a discourse of community could, for instance, be linked to high domestic standards and a culture of privacy.

Yet, discourse analysis, I maintain, had not been such a clear-cut business as the theorists had suggested. I found that analysis of discourse was not always a case of quickly and easily grouping together a set of ideas, meanings or representations

into discursive monoliths.⁸⁴ In part I attribute this to the large amounts of material I was dealing with. It was initially difficult to be familiar with it all at once. A more pressing problem was that not all of the material neatly fitted into one particular discourse of community. There were two aspects to this. Firstly, there were areas of overlap between the discourses, their margins were not always clear-cut. For instance, notions of public sociability, respectability and morality were not restricted to specific discourses. Similarly, there were also overlaps of personnel between the various discourses. Secondly, elements of the data did not necessarily fit into any of the discourses. Some were directly contrary. Frequently there would be, for instance, the comments of a resident or report of an activity of the tenants' association that would prove exceptional to the rule. The discourses of community then were neither as monolithic nor so all-encompassing as I had expected.

This difficulty in the analysis of the discourses of community has been stressed not least because it had implications for my interpretation of the discourses - my writing of Chapters Four, Five and Six. Chapters Four and Five are concerned with discourses of community from the viewpoint of the residents and their residents' associations. These discourses, and the differences between them, were far from immediately obvious, and it was often a painstaking process to piece them together from the evidence I had amassed. Not least, it was difficult to identify completely different discourses of community because of the areas of overlap between them. I began my interpretation, my construction of the discourses of community with few final, or even intermediate, conclusions in sight. When trying to make sense of the materials I had collected, I found it essential to repeatedly debate with myself the validity of any interpretation I placed on them. It was frequently necessary to re-orientate the directions in which the chapters appeared to be heading for the previous directions were no longer appropriate. I found it essential to try not to lose or misrepresent the contexts in which the discourses of community were expressed and situated. However, as the histories of the residents and their associations were unfolded on to the computer screen it slowly became

⁸⁴ See F. Driver, 'Geography's Empire: Histories of geographical knowledge', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10 (1992), 33.

more possible to formulate ideas of what the discourses of community were and where the chapters were heading. Still, I emphasise that throughout the writing I made repeated checks to ensure that I was not uncovering *my* discourses of community and finding room in those discourses to situate the meanings and values of community that belonged to the residents and their associations. For instance, where dissenting voices to the prevailing discourses of community were encountered, they were not ignored, blended in or marginalised. Rather I have been careful to point them out as external or contrary. However, the way that I have presented this thesis (three main chapters – one on each discourse) has perhaps overemphasised the differences between them, making them appear more as separate discourses than they are, given that they had so much in common.

Chapter Six, the discussion of the discourse of community of the Community Association movement, was less problematic in this sense. The discourse of community was more apparent. The Community Association movement was a nationally organised body dedicated to preaching a particular notion of community. Examining the materials it produced, there was most definitely a doctrine of community shouting up at me from the pages. Nevertheless, throughout the interpretation and writing it was still necessary for me to have an open mind, to be willing to change direction, and to restrain from rigidly adhering to any preconceptions that I had initially held or developed throughout the writing.

I believe this form of interpretation - essentially commonsense problematised to the level of a method - worked. Of course any attempt to treat as discourses the meanings that people attach to something as nebulous as 'community' involves a move away from the everyday language in which people explain their lives, but if a change in thesis title and a re-alignment of the thesis arguments are indicative, this thesis is, or at least tries to be, a faithful interpretation of the versions of community that existed in and around the cottage council estates of Roehampton and Watling in the inter-war years. The next chapter begins to set the context for these understandings by describing the two estates and the people they contained.

CHAPTER THREE - ROEHAMPTON AND WATLING.

A. Introduction.

In many respects Roehampton and Watling can be seen as typical of the cottage estates built by the L.C.C. in the years between the two World Wars. Both were based on the principles of estate and house design embodied within the Tudor Walters Report. Roehampton and Watling were, and indeed still are, attractive, low density suburban estates containing houses which, in the 1920s at least, were of a reasonably high standard. Yet, despite such obvious similarities, Roehampton and Watling also differed from each other, most notably in terms of their residents. Built at different times, the selection of tenants for a house on each estate was governed by a different set of priorities, which meant that the estates had different social compositions.

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate these points more fully. I want to give an outline of what Roehampton, Watling, and their populations were like. This will provide a context for the discussions of the different discourses of community on and around these estates which I develop in the subsequent chapters.

A brief description of each estate and its surrounding area is provided first. The people that moved in are then considered. I argue that although there was a broad range of tenants on both estates, there was also a definite distinction between them in terms of their overall class composition. I then go on to show that it was the timing of their construction and the factors which influenced the L.C.C. in its selection of residents for each estate which produced these differences.

B. The London County Council's Cottage Estates.

(i) Roehampton: Growing Out Of The Earth.

Roehampton was the “first of the new generation of L.C.C. estates” to be acquired and developed after the war.¹ Approval for the purchase of the one hundred and forty-seven acre site roughly one mile to the west of Putney, south-west London, had been granted by the Ministry of Health in July 1919. Prior to this it had formed part of a private park known as the Dover House Estate.

The L.C.C. had certainly chosen a location that was both rural and salubrious. Bordered by the Upper Richmond Road to the north, there was “agricultural land and an old convent school and a meadow” to the west.² To the east and adjoining the Upper Richmond Road were “a fairly large load of very affluent houses.”³ These were separated from the estate by Putney Park Lane, an unmade private road. Old Roehampton village lay to the south-west. The rest of the surrounding area “was occupied by great houses and their private estates.”⁴ With “much greenery on three sides, namely Barnes and Wimbledon Commons and Richmond Park,” the Number 30 bus from Putney “was considered the country bus.”⁵

By early 1920 building work under the provisions of the Addison Act had begun. As a result of the post-war shortages of labour and resources, the initial houses cost “the spectacular average price of £1150.”⁶ In spite of this, progress was slow. When the premature curtailment of the Addison Act was announced in July 1921, just seventeen houses had been built. Progress was also far from continuous. After the completion of a further six hundred and seven houses the Ministry, in view of marked falls in prices, terminated the contract. Work began again at the end of 1922 with a new contractor, only to stop when the firm failed in 1923. It was

¹ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 169.

² Interview with Mr. F.S. Hibbert by the author, 19.4.94.

³ Interview with Mr. N. Barnes by the author, 1.12.93.

⁴ Letter from Mr. L.J. Parsons to the author, 24.5.94.

⁵ Interview with Mr. Hibbert.

⁶ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 168.

December 1924 before the one hundred and sixty-eight houses of this second phase were finished. Eventually in 1927, Roehampton was completed when work on the third stage finished. Ninety-four acres of land were now developed, with the last houses being built under the 1923 Chamberlain Act. (See Figure 3.1):

“The first section came up to that side of Hawkesbury, the north side of Hawkesbury. And the next section came up as far as Parkstead which is up here, and then the third section went on beyond.”⁷

In total there were 1,212 dwellings, ranging from five-room houses to two-room flats, and housing a population of over five thousand.⁸

Throughout the building care had been taken to preserve the natural beauty of the site by retaining many trees, and the finished estate layout closely followed the recommendations of the Tudor Walters Report; it was “all very open, all very garden city.”⁹

“Houses were termed as cottages. The pavements were very wide and planted with almond and laburnum trees, as were the front gardens, which were edged with privet.”¹⁰

Admittedly the houses were built at a higher than recommended density of 15.8 per acre, but low density techniques of arrangement, such as allotments, set-backs in the building line and the extensive use of greens, were still evident. However, cul-de-sacs were avoided after the London Building Acts Committee remarked on the similarity of their design to some of London’s slums.¹¹

The houses were varied in their appearance, reflecting in part the numerous interruptions to the building programme. On the early parts of the estate, the intention was to follow “Hampstead Garden Suburb in its allegiance to the romantic concept of buildings ‘growing out of the earth’.”¹² Here high quality materials were creatively used:

“Its absolutely magnificent. Each little group of houses here is a different design from the next one. They’re all different, its quite remarkable. ... If

⁷ Interview with Mrs. M. Newman by the author, 9.2.94.

⁸ See A.A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*, 303.

⁹ Interview with Mrs. A. Power by the author, 26.5.94.

¹⁰ Letter from Mrs. R. Noon to the author, 16.7.94.

¹ See M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 169.

¹² M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 177.

you look across the road from where you're sitting, that's a completely different design from here, a completely different design. And the more you look at them, the more interesting they become - the use of bricks, the use of colours in bricks, the shapes of archways."¹³

On the latter portions of Roehampton, however, economising meant smaller houses, the use of cheaper materials and the absence of expensive detailing.

"As financial problems arose so each new builder made the houses smaller as they went up the hill. They were smaller and smaller so that when you got to the top ones, you could, if you opened the front door you had to close all the other doors, you know, otherwise you couldn't get in."¹⁴

"If you look at the buildings at the far end compared to the ones down here, there's more of a sameness, a council effect. ... In other words what they were having to do was to standardise on the shape so that the money was stretching further and further."¹⁵

Essentially, the houses "weren't built as good."¹⁶

This was also the case within the houses. Not only were the early houses well-furnished with fitted cupboards in the living room and bedrooms, but they also contained expensive hot water systems, with bathrooms mainly on the first floor:

"Each of these houses had in its front room a grate, a fire grate, and above it an oven. ... Now behind the oven was a hot water tank, and that automatically went up to the airing cupboard, and automatically it was pumped, not pumped, but you could draw it into the bath."¹⁷

However, "these were luxuries unprecedented in L.C.C. houses, and they were not to outlast the Addison programme."¹⁸ As such, many residents on the latter parts of the estate recalled instead "the copper in the kitchen in which a fire was lit to heat up our bath water which was pumped through to the bathroom downstairs next to the kitchen."¹⁹ Whilst, "in some houses you had to literally bale out the water and take it to the bathroom."²⁰

¹³ Interview with Mr. L.J. Parsons by the author, 24.5.94.

¹⁴ Interview with Mr. Hibbert.

¹⁵ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

¹⁶ Interview with Miss N. Morrell by the author, 23.5.94.

¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

¹⁸ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 171.

¹⁹ Letter from Mrs. Noon.

²⁰ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

For the children of the estate, the L.C.C. built Huntingfield Road School. As the estate grew, so the school on the estate's western edge was enlarged until it was completed in 1925. According to *The Times Educational Supplement*, it was "fortunate in its environment, for nearby are wide strips of public common and heathland; it is centrally placed on an estate, which, when fully developed and planted, will be one of the most attractive housing estates in this country."²¹

Beyond the houses and the school, however, the L.C.C. provided scant facilities for its tenants. This was not because they believed they would be of no benefit to the estate residents. In 1922, for instance, when a Mr. Hedgman of Beaconsfield House, Richmond wanted to build a hall on Roehampton to be "used for various forms of philanthropic work such as girls and boys clubs, lectures and other activities", it was seen as a "suitable development" offering "advantages" to the estate.²² Yet the Council never adopted as a policy the provision of accommodation for the social activities of the tenants.²³ Although there was, in fact, space for a hall in the original plan of Roehampton, this was in anticipation of "the tenants or some local body" erecting a hall, not the L.C.C.²⁴ Having built the houses, the Council were reluctant to spend further money.²⁵

Shops were included in the estate design on the northern boundary, facing the Upper Richmond Road. These, however, were privately developed. Religious needs had to be catered for by the pre-existing St. Margaret's Church on Putney Park Lane and St. Joseph's Church in Roehampton Village. Similarly, no new pubs were built, not even of the L.C.C.'s 'improved' type. Still though, there was the Northumberland Arms nearby on the Upper Richmond Road, whilst there were also the Earl Spencer, the Montague, and the Angel, amongst others, in Roehampton

²¹ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14.9.25, 14.

²² Reports of the Valuer to Housing Committee, 8.11.22 and 14.3.23. Greater London Record Office [G.L.R.O.] files LCC/MIN/7467 and LCC/MIN 7469.

²³ Letter from F. Hunt (L.C.C. Valuer) to H. Sheasby (Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association [R.E.T.A.]), 1.1.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/26.

²⁴ Letter from F. Hunt to H. Sheasby, 4.12.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

²⁵ Notes taken from A. Olechnowicz, 'The Development of Local Government in the Dagenham Estate during the Inter-War Period'. Paper presented at the Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 3.3.93.

village: “plenty of pubs there, but it was quite a walk.”²⁶ For other entertainments, residents had to journey to Putney, or perhaps look further afield to areas like Hammersmith.

Overall, however, in spite of the lack of facilities and varied quality of houses, Roehampton estate was still recognised as “possibly, and almost certainly probably, the best of the estates that the L.C.C. did.”²⁷

“I think this was their prize estate at that time.”²⁸

“A show place in its day and visited by many from all over the world.”²⁹ As Swenarton notes, “it set the standard for L.C.C. building in general.”³⁰ As a result the move to the estate was frequently welcomed; “Roehampton Estate in those days was a delightful place to live.”³¹

“They thought it was marvellous - a house to their own, a back gate, side entrance, all these rooms.”³²

“A pleasure to live in because you had come from a much grimmer environment.”³³

(ii) *Watling: A Beautiful Garden City.*

Although Roehampton was the first of the post-war estates, there had actually been L.C.C. plans for a housing estate in north London since the nineteenth century. In 1892, for instance, the chairman of the Council’s Public Health and Housing Committee had told the Joint Committee on Electric and Cable Railways (Metropolis) that the suggested Hampstead tube railway “might be continued four or five miles out beyond Hampstead, so as to start a new town, some distance from the edge of the County.”³⁴ Following the extension of the tube to Edgware in 1924, therefore, the L.C.C. decided to establish the Watling housing estate on roughly three

²⁶ Interview with Mr. Hibbert.

²⁷ Interview with Mr. Barnes.

²⁸ Interview with Mrs. Morrell.

²⁹ Letter from Mrs. Noon.

³⁰ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 169.

³¹ Letter from Mrs. Noon.

³² Interview with Mrs. Power.

³³ Interview with Mr. Barnes.

³⁴ Quoted in A.A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*, 304.

hundred and ninety acres of land between Burnt Oak and Mill Hill Station, in the then Urban District of Hendon. Possession of the land was obtained by compulsory powers, aided by purchase under agreement.³⁵

The site was bordered by the tube line and Edgware Road on the west, the London North Eastern Railway on the north, and Hendon Aerodrome to the south-east.³⁶ In common with Roehampton, the area was predominantly rural; fields, lanes, hedgerows, a few old farms and scattered Edwardian villas were the typical features.³⁷ As one resident recalled, a herdsman once drove a herd of cows down the road outside her house.³⁸ The growing suburban districts of Mill Hill and Edgware lay short walks to the east and north, respectively.

Construction work, financed by the 1924 Wheatley Act, was begun in February 1926 and the first houses were completed in April of the following year. Compared to Roehampton, progress was rapid and by 1930 the estate was finished, with 4021 houses and flats occupied by over nineteen thousand people. (See Figure 3.2).

As with other L.C.C. cottage estates, Watling closely followed Roehampton in sticking to the principles of development as advocated by Tudor Walters; “it was a beautiful garden city.”³⁹ Built at slightly less than eleven to the acre, each house was set in its own garden:

“Outside all the houses they planted a plant called Five Finger Jack. And it was like climbing ivy and it covered all the houses. ... Then in the autumn that used to turn to red, and this was a sight to see. It was beautiful. The whole estate had these beautiful red climbers up the walls. It was lovely.”⁴⁰

The usual low density techniques of arrangement, including closes this time, were exploited to the full. Forty-one acres of the site were allocated to open spaces, including greens, parks and allotments. Again, in line with Council policy, there was much effort to build around the natural charm of the area, with the layout of the

³⁵ See A.G. Clarke, *The Story of Goldbeaters and Watling* (London, 1931), 3 & 20.

³⁶ See E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, *Watling Community Association*, 1.

³⁷ See Political and Economic Planning [P.E.P.], ‘Watling Revisited’, *Planning XIV* (270) (1947), 63.

³⁸ Interview with Mrs. Y. Ryall by the author, 21.6.94.

³⁹ Interview with Mrs. E. Lewington by the author, 2.8.94.

⁴⁰ Interview with Mrs. V. Bunyan by the author, 17.6.94.

estate permitting the retention of most of the trees, some of the hedgerows, and a pre-existing winding stream.⁴¹ As D.G. Denoon of the Mill Hill Historical Society wrote in 1931:

“In the Watling Estate to-day two natural features are still in existence for all to see, and these give a clue to the appearance of the land before it came into the possession of the L.C.C. I refer, needless to say, to the wealth of magnificent trees and to the Silkstream which pleasantly flows through permanently preserved open spaces. To Mr. G. Topham Forrest, the architect responsible for the lay-out of the Estate, special praise is due for the retention of these features, the absence of which would undoubtedly have caused the many roads to appear as mere bricks and mortar instead of the pleasant thoroughfares we use to-day.”⁴²

The standard of the houses compared favourably to that on the latter stages of Roehampton. Again the minima sizes proposed within the Tudor Walters Report generally turned out to be the maxima and, internally, the early luxuries of the Addison Act were not repeated. Similarly, houses of the same type showed less variation. The appearance of the estate was not uniform, however, as methods of construction varied. Although traditional houses of bricks and mortar were the most common, concrete-walled houses, steel-framed houses and timber-framed houses were also built because of shortages of skilled building labour.⁴³ (See Plates 3.1 & 3.2). In this respect, Watling was considered an experimental estate.⁴⁴

A common problem experienced by the L.C.C. on its out-county estates was the reluctance of local authorities to provide schools for the sudden influx of children, and, initially, Watling was no exception to this. In the autumn of 1927, two hundred and sixty-nine children out of eight hundred and ninety-six were without school places and faced the alternative of either no schooling or a trip down the Edgware Road to Hendon. Not until 1928 was a school opened within the estate. By January 1930, however, there was full provision for the children, and with the opening of the six hundred and forty place Orange Hill Central School at the

⁴¹ See *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 6.

⁴² Foreword to A.G. Clarke, *The Story of Goldbeaters and Watling*, 3-4.

⁴³ See A.A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*, 304.

⁴⁴ See *Barnet Civic News*, May 1983, 6.

end of 1931 there were five local authority schools at Watling providing six thousand places.⁴⁵

In distinction to Roehampton, the L.C.C. did build the shops on Watling. The initial and main shopping area was on Watling Avenue between Burnt Oak Station and the Edgware Road, with a further set of shops being developed later, as building was completed, to the north-east of the estate in Deansbrook Road. Besides these shops, however, the Council only built a clinic for its tenants, and “left no sites for such things as a library, swimming bath or a community centre.”⁴⁶ Admittedly there were plans for a pub, or as the Housing Committee put it “facilities should be afforded for the provision of a refreshment house.”⁴⁷ These, however, were abandoned after difficulties with the local licensing authorities. As on Roehampton then, the L.C.C. failed to make any generous provision of public buildings or facilities. Yet, just as the residents of Roehampton could still view their new homes and estate in a positive manner, so too did people who moved to Watling. Leslie Wisdan’s mother, for instance, “could have gone down on her knees and thanked God for the opportunity” when she was being shown around by an L.C.C. official.⁴⁸ Similarly, another former resident remarked that the house was like “a palace” when they first walked in.⁴⁹

Further, it would be unfair to say that there were no amenities whatsoever for the new tenants. First, the churches were notably active. The Anglican St. Alphage’s Vicarage was the first house on Watling to be occupied, with the church opening six months later in October 1927. Woodcroft Hall, under the direction of John Laing and the Plymouth Brethren, opened its doors in January 1928. In 1929 construction of the Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation was completed, and soon followed by the Wesley Central Hall in 1930. Finally, in 1936, a second Anglican church, John Keble, which although outside the estate did include part of

⁴⁵ See A.A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*, 304-5.

⁴⁶ P.E.P., ‘Watling Revisited’, 63.

⁴⁷ Report of the Housing Committee, 15.5.28., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1928* (London, 1928), 742.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mr. L. Wisdan by the author, 27.6.94.

⁴⁹ Mr. Barker. Interview with Mr. R. Barker and Mr. T. Symmond by the author, 1.7.94.

Watling within its parish, was consecrated.⁵⁰ Second, the presence of the estate, and numerous other private estates in the area, encouraged the development of the Edgware Road. A thousand-seat cinema opened there in 1929, followed by numerous department stores and a second cinema in the 1930s.

(iii) Conclusion.

In terms of quality, layout and design the London County Council cottage estates of Roehampton and Watling were remarkably similar. They were both “suburban estates ... characterised by salubrious and other beneficial conditions.”⁵¹ Although the houses of Watling were cheaper, and in some cases smaller, than those of Roehampton, “what these changes meant in practice was not a major departure from Tudor Walters’ layouts and plans.”⁵²

“A new type of house was being built, a bigger house, with better fittings, in more open surroundings, with the added advantages of garden plots: a type of working-class dwelling hitherto practically non-existent.”⁵³

Further, just as Roehampton was developed in a predominantly rural area, so was Watling. Although this, coupled with the reluctance of the L.C.C. to build a great deal else other than houses, ensured that the provision of amenities and facilities for the tenants of both estates was certainly not overwhelming, the improved houses and their environment were in the main appreciated by the new residents.

C. The Selection Of Residents.

The tenants of Roehampton and Watling, however, were not alike. Building work on Watling began six years later than it did on Roehampton, and in those intervening years the ideological and economic factors which governed the provision of state-assisted housing changed distinctly. As such, the influences under which the L.C.C. selected its tenants for the two estates had changed accordingly, and the

⁵⁰ See R. Durant, *Watling*, 52.

⁵¹ Report of the Housing Committee, 26.1.26., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1926* (London, 1926), 155.

⁵² J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, 228.

composition of each estate's population reflected this. These issues form the focus of the remainder of this chapter. Just what sort of person came from London to live in the new 'working-class' dwellings?

An indication of this can be obtained from the L.C.C.'s statistics concerning the occupations of the heads of families on the estates, published annually from 1930 onwards. (See Tables 3.1 and 3.2). This data, I suggest, implies that there was a marked difference in social class between Roehampton and Watling, and the remainder of this chapter is concerned to explain how this came about. Having said this, however, I wish to emphasise, as I have detailed in Chapter One, that I am not claiming that social class can be read simply and directly from such occupational data. Occupation is not everything, for social class is also mediated through culture and politics. At the very least, however, occupation does provide an indication of class. For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, I wish to use these two tables, together with my interviews and other sources, to begin to demonstrate that the class structures of Roehampton and Watling were different.

Before doing this, however, the statistics and tables do need to be explained. I have chosen to use the L.C.C. statistics in preference to census data for two reasons. First, the L.C.C. data were simply geographically more precise than the census, being restricted solely to the residents of the estates. Second, with the L.C.C. data collected annually this enabled changes in the estates' occupational structures to be examined without leaving the inter-war period. This was important not simply because it allowed me to remain within the confines of this work's remit, but because it was stressed to me by many of my interviewees that the populations of both estates changed greatly with the advent of World War II.

Constructing the tables was a hazardous task because the raw L.C.C. data contained a few problematic characteristics. One minor point is that these data are solely for the heads of households. As such, it is primarily a reflection of male occupational status, for female-headed households only occurred if the male tenancy-holder died, and then only if his widow was able to continue to pay the rent. As I point out in Chapter Four, however, working wives on the estates were rare. This

⁵³ J.R. Jarman, *Housing Subsidies and Rents: a study of local authorities' problems*

shortcoming in the data should not be seen as too serious, therefore. Of more importance, as the L.C.C. noted of its own statistics:

“These particulars, while conveying a general idea of the different occupations of the tenants, in some respects do not adequately describe the nature of employment owing to the individual tenants’ varying descriptions of their employment. The information is obtained from the tenants, who, it will be realised, do not in many cases give clear and precise descriptions of their occupations. ... The description ‘civil servant’ probably includes such employees as postmen and messengers as well as clerical employees.”⁵⁴

In view of this, any attempt at a complex classification of the data, such as its division into the categories employed with census data by the Registrar General or the schema suggested by Goldthorpe and Hope, was unworkable.⁵⁵ The general nature of the job descriptions ensured that they could rarely be categorised with absolute confidence into these classes. Even if this had not been the case, the small size of the populations I was dealing with, particularly on Roehampton, meant that the numbers that would have come out in each category would have been meaningless. Drawing on the guidelines for categorisation suggested by these classifications, however, it was possible to assign the occupations, somewhat more confidently and with more meaning, to the rather broader categories that I have used (see Appendix Two for lists of the occupations in each category). These, I feel, draw out the major differences between the two estates.

In simple terms, Roehampton’s population was weighted more towards white collar workers than Watling’s. In 1930, for instance, over thirty-six per cent. of Roehampton’s heads of household were employed in white collar work, compared to approximately fifteen per cent. on Watling. There was notably a greater proportion of clerks and civil servants on the estate. Conversely, Watling’s population had a larger proportion of unskilled workers in comparison to Roehampton, nearly twenty-nine per cent. as opposed to seventeen per cent. Rather than clerks and civil

(London, 1948), 42.

⁵⁴ L.C.C., *Housing Estates: Statistics for the Year 1929-30* (London, 1930), 3.

⁵⁵ J.H. Goldthorpe & K. Hope, *The Social Gradings of Occupations: A new approach and scale* (Oxford, 1974).

servants, labourers and motor drivers were more likely to be the norm. How, then, did these differences arise?

(i) Roehampton: A Carefully Selected Group.

Roehampton was built, in part at least, under the 1919 Addison Act. It was also the first of the post-war estates to be commenced by the L.C.C. The ideological reasons behind the building programme at this time have already been briefly examined in Chapter One. The new 'Homes fit for Heroes' were built to a high standard, as described above, so as to "persuade the people that their aspirations would be met under the existing order, and thereby wean them from any ideas of revolution."⁵⁶

However, at the close of World War I, contemporary observers were still "careful to distinguish between the newly overcrowded and the long term slum dwellers."⁵⁷ The "newly and 'unjustifiably' overcrowded people" were seen as only in that position due to the effects of the war, not through any fault of their own, and it was for them that the new estates were built.⁵⁸ Although "it was crucial for the ideological function of the housing programme that the houses be indisputably better than working-class houses of the past", the houses were to be "aimed not at slum-dwellers but at ex-servicemen and the organised working class."⁵⁹ Further, as Garside points out, the emphasis on 'Heroes' did not "necessarily or primarily [mean] working class ex-servicemen."⁶⁰ Thus the:

"Suburban housebuilding was not designed to meet the needs of the old slums ... Rather it was aimed at preventing existing slum dwellers from joining forces with others who now found themselves overcrowded - that is, the middle-class and skilled working class who in the pre-war period had easily and readily catered for themselves in the private suburban market."⁶¹

⁵⁶ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 86.

⁵⁷ P.L. Garside, 'Unhealthy Areas: Town Planning, Eugenics and the Slums, 1890-1945', *Planning Perspectives* 3 (1988), 30.

⁵⁸ P.L. Garside, 'London and the Home Counties' in F.M.L. Thompson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Volume 1, Regions and Communities*, (Cambridge, 1990), 528.

⁵⁹ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 187.

⁶⁰ P.L. Garside, 'Unhealthy Areas', 31.

⁶¹ P.L. Garside, 'Unhealthy Areas', 30.

In other words, the moral distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor which was so evident in the activities of the model dwelling associations was still much to the fore. As J.P. Orr, the L.C.C.'s Director of Housing, explained, Roehampton would appeal to "those of the working class whose standards and ideals are the highest."⁶² Moreover, "the term 'working class' was to be widely interpreted."⁶³

As part of the process of ensuring that the 'unfit' were not allocated a house, everyone would be "interviewed at their home before there was any question of moving."⁶⁴ The stark reality for the initial post-war applicants, according to J.P. Orr once again, was that no one was "accepted as a tenant if he [*sic*] has not got a good record for cleanliness."⁶⁵

Beyond selecting only the 'desirable' tenants, however, local authorities were also concerned about applicants' ability to pay the rents.⁶⁶ In the case of the L.C.C.:

"Careful enquiry is made as to the constitution of the applicant's family, and, as rents are fixed for particular cottages and are not subject to variation to suit the means of particular tenants, the earnings of the various members of the family are now investigated to ensure that there will be no difficulty about punctual payment of the higher rents that are now required."⁶⁷

In fact, as Swenarton notes, incomes had to be "at least five times greater than the total of rents, rates and fares."⁶⁸

On Roehampton, as with other estates built under the 1919 programme, the rents were high. In 1927 some of the early houses were being let for nearly thirty shillings a week, whilst even the later houses, built after costs had fallen, were still expensive in comparison with other estates.⁶⁹ Yet Bowley calculated that ten shillings a week was the maximum that the majority of the working class could put

⁶² M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 173.

⁶³ J.R. Jarman, *Housing Subsidies and Rents*, 41.

⁶⁴ Recollection of Mr. E. Phillips, former Becontree estate clerk, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country: Memories of London families who settled the new cottage estates 1919-1939* (London, 1991), 23.

⁶⁵ L.C.C., *Working Class Dwellings: Statistics for the year 1919-1920* (London, 1920), 2.

⁶⁶ M.J. Daunton, 'Housing', 240.

⁶⁷ L.C.C., *Working Class Dwellings: Statistics for the year 1919-1920*, 2.

⁶⁸ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*, 174.

⁶⁹ See L.C.C., *Housing Estates: Statistics for the year 1927-28* (London, 1928), 17.

aside for rent at this time.⁷⁰ The economic reality then, since the tenants were to be “an asset and not a liability from the rent paying standpoint,” was that only “the higher paid artisans and persons of a similar economic status could afford to pay the rents which the local authorities were obliged to charge.”⁷¹

On Roehampton then, as with many of the early post-war estates, “notions of the ‘deserving poor’” and stringent income requirements formed a formidable barrier to the granting of a tenancy:⁷²

“The earliest people here were chosen. They were chosen. They didn’t say they wanted to come here and came. They were chosen to come because they all had a steady job, and they were also chosen on what they looked like. ... They, they were very careful who they brought here. You just couldn’t move here because you said you wanted to live here. You, I suppose in a way you were invited to come at the end of the day.”⁷³

Furthermore, ten per cent., although this later fell to five per cent., of the houses were to be preferentially allocated to the Council’s employees as it was considered important that they should be adequately housed conveniently for their work.⁷⁴ Overall, therefore, the first generation of tenants were, in the main, “a carefully selected group, who but for the War might have been expected to find their own accommodation without any assistance from the State.”⁷⁵

Daunton, for instance, writing in general of estates built under the 1919 Act, suggests that the tenants “were largely drawn from the better-paid working class and some white-collar workers.”⁷⁶ In the case of Roehampton’s first residents though, even this might appear to be an understatement. In October 1925, for instance, the

⁷⁰ M. Bowley, *Housing and the State 1919-1944* (London, 1945), 96-7.

⁷¹ Central Housing Advisory Committee [C.H.A.C.], *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities* (6.4.38), 3. Public Record Office [P.R.O.] file HLG 37/14.

⁷² P. Dickens & P. Gilbert, ‘Inter-war housing policy: a case study of Brighton’, *Southern History* 3 (1981), 202.

⁷³ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

⁷⁴ Report of the Housing Committee, 15.3.21., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1921* (London, 1921), 401.

⁷⁵ C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 3.

⁷⁶ M.J. Daunton, ‘Housing’, 240.

Evening News reported that they were mostly professional people.⁷⁷ According to the residents themselves:

“Most of the new residents were the likes of bus drivers and conductors, bus inspectors, policemen, postal workers, civil servants, and so on.”⁷⁸

“A lot of the people out here were at least middle grade civil servants. I mean I wouldn’t say they were top-end, but they weren’t the clerking part of the civil service. They were sort of you know the middle scale.”⁷⁹

“When we first came here the person next door to us was a colonel. ... It was very much different from what it is now. I suppose we were classified as middle class in those days.”⁸⁰

These are views that the L.C.C.’s statistics presented in Table 3.1 appear to bear witness to. In 1930, for instance, over a third of the tenants were in white collar employment.⁸¹

This is not to say, however, that all the tenants of Roehampton were so elite. Slightly more than seventeen per cent. of tenants were unskilled.⁸² There were skilled workers too, approximately a third of the population, and not all of these led a particularly comfortable life. Ivy Woollett and her family, for instance, moved to the estate in the early 1920s, five years after her father first applied for a house after coming out of the army. He was a motor coach builder and, as Mrs. Woollett recalled, he chose to live in the middle house of a group of three, as that was the cheapest. Further, he suffered periods of unemployment, sometimes long enough to get relief tickets, and at these times the family diet became very basic.⁸³

There was clearly a range of people on Roehampton. However, many of the tenants *were* a ‘carefully selected group’, and generally “the new housing came to be occupied by those who least needed it.”⁸⁴ In fact, some of the residents were so select it is almost staggering:

⁷⁷ See *Evening News*, 7.10.25, 11.

⁷⁸ Letter from Mr. Parsons.

⁷⁹ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

⁸⁰ Interview with Mr. P. Pearson by the author, 25.4.94.

⁸¹ See Table 3.1.

⁸² See Table 3.1.

⁸³ Interview with Mrs. I. Woollett by the author, 21.12.93. See also her recollections in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 24.

⁸⁴ P. Dickens & P. Gilbert, ‘Inter-war housing policy’, 202.

“There were even a few cases, and this seems unbelievable, but some people had maids. They could afford them because they were in reasonable jobs - civil servants or whatever.”⁸⁵

“On the corner of Swinburne Road there were a family who had a live-in maid. And then the Derringtons, they were a family that lived at the end of Lysons Walk, a couple of cars you know.”⁸⁶

As Jarmain notes, many tenants were receiving “public subsidies to which they could justify no claim.”⁸⁷

By 1932 the L.C.C. obviously realised this as they asked 201 “well-to-do tenants” whose means were considered to be too great, to vacate and obtain accommodation elsewhere.⁸⁸ Still, the Council remained careful about who now moved in. First, it appears they were intent on maintaining the reputation of Roehampton as their prize estate. Frank Hibbert, for instance, whose father was a commercial artist in Fleet Street, moved to the estate in the spring of 1935.⁸⁹ As his father, also Frank Hibbert, recalled:

“I heard about the Roehampton Estate from the office boy at work. Up until then we never knew it existed. We made several enquiries to the London County Council. ... The council recommended all the other estates, but they never told us about the Dover House, Roehampton Estate. It was the best estate and that’s why it was so difficult to get into.”⁹⁰

Second, the gross rents of Roehampton were still relatively high. Even the cheapest two room flats, for instance, were never less than fourteen shillings and four pence a week throughout the inter-war period.⁹¹ So the L.C.C. were still concerned that the tenants had regular, stable jobs that were relatively well-paid.

“The next phase was, you could not come to live here unless you had a regular job where there was a guaranteed wage. And that meant that automatically everybody that came to live here were either postmen or

⁸⁵ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

⁸⁶ Interview with Mrs. K. Connelly by the author, 7.6.94.

⁸⁷ J.R. Jarmain, *Housing Subsidies and Rents*, 3.

⁸⁸ *The Wandsworth Borough News*, 2.12.32, 11.

⁸⁹ Interview with Mr. Hibbert.

⁹⁰ Recollection of Mr. F.B. Hibbert, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 25.

⁹¹ See L.C.C., *Housing Estates: Statistics for the year 1933-34* (London, 1934), 15.

electric board or gas board, my father was a bus driver, train drivers - those sort of people, they were all really public service employees.”⁹²

“We had bus drivers, policemen, tram drivers and postmen living on the estate. When we walked up into the village one of the locals would say ‘Hello, here comes Uniform Town.’”⁹³

By the end of the 1930s then, although the proportion of white collar workers among the tenants had fallen to just over twenty-one per cent., the population of Roehampton was still relatively select.⁹⁴ It was certainly more select than that of Watling.

(ii) Watling: The Benefits Of Municipal Housing.

Although the minority Labour Government which came to power in 1924 was relatively short-lived, one of its more enduring legacies was the 1924 Housing (Financial Provisions) Act, more commonly known as the Wheatley Act. With the 1923 Chamberlain Act being directed mainly at encouraging private housebuilding, this represented the first real return to a programme of Exchequer subsidised municipal building after the 1921 curtailment of the Addison Act.⁹⁵ The ideological motives behind the two Acts were significantly different, however. With the post-war collapse of the housebuilding market and the widespread fears of revolution, the Addison Act had aimed to remove from the slums those who Garside calls the “newly and ‘unjustifiably’ overcrowded people,” “the middle-class and skilled working-class.”⁹⁶ The 1924 Labour Government, on the other hand, viewed council involvement as a normal means of supplying working-class housing.⁹⁷ With the help of agreements with the building industry trade unions, the Minister of Health, Wheatley, “hoped to stimulate the building of houses at rents within the capacity to pay of the poorest.”⁹⁸ Although this was not achieved - the returned Conservative

⁹² Interview with Mrs. Newman.

⁹³ Recollection of Mr. L.C. Alder, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 60.

⁹⁴ See Table 3.1.

⁹⁵ A.E. Holmans, *Housing Policy in Britain* (Beckenham, 1987), 305.

⁹⁶ P.L. Garside, ‘London and the Home Counties’, 528; P.L. Garside, ‘Unhealthy Areas’, 30.

⁹⁷ See M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, 15.

⁹⁸ J.R. Jarman, *Housing Subsidies and Rents*, 78.

government reducing in 1926 the terms of the subsidy available to local authorities - council housebuilding for the poorer sections of society had been established.⁹⁹

This was facilitated by the cost of housebuilding at the time. As Jarman writes of houses built under the Wheatley Act:

“Although building costs continued to fluctuate, even at their highest in December, 1926, the average net cost of a non-parlour house never rose above £448 ... There was no return to the high peak of 1919-20. The rents of later houses, therefore, tended to fall, even taking into account different rates of subsidy and new conditions governing rents.”¹⁰⁰

To put it simply, the houses built by local authorities under the Act of 1924 were cheaper than those built under the 1919 Act and could be let at a lower rent. It was thus possible for the local authorities “to draw upon poorer sections of the population for their tenants.”¹⁰¹

It was on this basis, under the provisions of the Wheatley Act, that the Watling estate was built and subsequently populated. First, the rents were relatively cheap. In 1932, for instance, the gross rents of three-room cottages on Watling started at eleven shillings and one pence per week, compared to fifteen shillings and two pence on Roehampton.¹⁰² Second, the changing emphasis as to who council houses should be occupied by was also noticeable. By 1925, rather than handing out houses to its own employees, the L.C.C. was preferentially allotting seventy-five per cent. of its new accommodation to families living in overcrowded or unhealthy conditions, in view of the fact that “many of the general applicants are already living in relatively reasonable accommodation, but still want a council house at below the economic rent.”¹⁰³ According to the Housing Committee, “many of the families thus preferentially accommodated were very poor, and were found to have been living in only one room or two.”¹⁰⁴ Further, although this meant that the L.C.C. now ran “the

⁹⁹ See for instance A.E. Holmans, *Housing Policy in Britain*, 86; N. Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties* (Minneapolis, 1976), 114-5.

¹⁰⁰ J.R. Jarman, *Housing Subsidies and Rents*, 64.

¹⁰¹ C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 3.

¹⁰² See L.C.C., *Housing Estates: Statistics for the year 1932-33* (London, 1933), 17.

¹⁰³ Report of the Housing Committee, 21.7.25., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1925* (London, 1926), 187.

¹⁰⁴ Report of the Housing Committee, 26.1.26., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1926* (London, 1926), 154.

risk of loss and general deterioration” within its estates and began to experience difficulties in preventing the accumulation of rent arrears, the Housing Committee refused to “advise the Council to select only the more prosperous of the working class population as tenants for its houses.”¹⁰⁵

Admittedly, attention was still being paid to ‘respectability’, cleanliness and rent-paying capacity. For instance, in 1929, the principle reasons given by the L.C.C. for the rejection of housing applications were:

“That the inclusive rent of the accommodation sufficient for the needs of the applicant’s family would prove too great a drain on his [*sic*] resources, or that his present mode of living, and the condition of his home generally, do not come up to the standard which, we are sure, the Council requires to maintain on its estates.”¹⁰⁶

Similarly, Ronald Payne, a former estate clerk on the Watling estate, recalled:

“We would send a referencer around who would call unexpected on them to see whether the information that they’d given on the form of application was true. And the referencer was required to state whether or not the person was, a thing you had to tick I think, I think a good tenant whose situation could improve or not a very good type of prospect.”¹⁰⁷

But clearly, in comparison to Roehampton at the very least, the L.C.C., when it was allocating houses on the Watling estate, did not feel “the same need to discriminate in the process of selection; a larger number of working class families were able to enjoy the benefits of municipal housing.”¹⁰⁸

Specifically, many Watling tenants were “largely decanted from the Kings Cross and Camden areas, and other parts of Islington and Camden where slum clearance was being carried out.”¹⁰⁹ As Colonel C.B. Levita, the Chairman of the Housing Committee, put it in 1928:

¹⁰⁵ Report of the Housing Committee, 26.1.26.

¹⁰⁶ Report of the Housing Committee, 17.12.29., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1929* (London, 1930), 944.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Mr. R. Payne by the author, 23.6.94.

¹⁰⁸ C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 3-4.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Mr. Payne.

“Owing to slum work we have to use the ‘pool’ - there has been a big push lately, and many come from St. Pancras.”¹¹⁰

To use a phrase of one former resident, “they were people from the sort of back streets of London.”¹¹¹

Not all the tenants had come from slum areas, however, and although Durant points out that “with few exceptions” they were all wage-earners, the population of Watling did “not represent a distinct stratum of the working class.”¹¹² Rather, as on Roehampton, “there was a whole scan of people.”¹¹³ As Ron Southwell described it:

“There was a strata, a strata of class within this society within, within the estate. There were people who did working-class jobs, there were people who did skilled jobs, and there were people who went to the station carrying brief cases.”¹¹⁴

Yet in contrast to Roehampton, there were proportionately fewer at the top of the strata, and significantly more in the lower reaches. The L.C.C. statistics for 1930, for instance, indicate that while more than thirty-six per cent. of Roehampton residents were employed in white collar occupations, Watling’s white collar residents amounted to only about sixteen per cent. of the estate’s population. At the other end of the spectrum, nearly thirty per cent. of the Watling residents were unskilled workers, compared to only about seventeen per cent. on Roehampton.¹¹⁵

Further, not only were there no tenants on Watling able to afford the luxuries of maids and their own cars, but there were many instead who were experiencing varying degrees of poverty. Mr. Barker, for instance, recalled how his father used to have to draw money when unemployed for five years during the 1930s:

“My dad used to have to walk down, and he used to go up and queue, and a policemen used to knock them into line. ... I know things were so hard that if you heard there was bread going, you used to go down with pillow cases

¹¹⁰ Rough Notes of proceedings of Conference of the 18th April 1928, between representatives of the L.C.C. and representatives of the Watling Residents’ Association [W.R.A.] G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹¹¹ Mr. Symmond. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

¹¹² See R. Durant, *Watling*, 3-7.

¹¹³ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Mr. R. Southwell by the author, 14.6.94.

¹¹⁵ See Tables 3.1 and 3.2.

and line up as kids, for you know stale, almost stale bread, or bread left over from the day before.”¹¹⁶

Similarly, Leslie Wisdan recalled the importance of the pawnbrokers:

“Down the top of Horsecroft, Mrs. Miller, she used to pawn her washing every, every Monday morning. Her laundry, bed sheets, bed linen. And take it out again on Friday night. ... She used to cart it down to Harvey and Thompsons, who were the big pawnbrokers in Watling. ... Harvey and Thompsons, they were the lifeblood of many people in Watling.”¹¹⁷

Even the L.C.C. realised the precarious existence of its tenants:

“Watling estate has the greatest claim to a reduction of rent. The tenants at this estate consist largely of those who previously lived under conditions of hardship in the London area, and now have the added burden of increased travelling expenses. We suggest a reduction of 1s. a week”.¹¹⁸

Again in comparison to Roehampton, therefore, not only did Watling contain a relatively “larger number of working class families”, but they were also from the “poorer sections of the population.”¹¹⁹

D. Conclusion.

The London County Council cottage estates of Roehampton and Watling may at first glance appear very similar, but any similarity should not include their populations. Both estates may have been built of ‘working-class’ dwellings, but to simply say that the tenants were ‘working-class’ people is clearly misleading. I stress again that the occupational data I have used cannot tell everything about social class, yet the presence of white collar workers on both estates, although more so on Roehampton of course, suggests that many residents may not have held working-class values at all. Looking at the estates in this way, I want to begin to suggest that their class structures did differ.

On Roehampton, as with many other 1919 estates, the tenants were initially very select from both an ideological and economic standpoint. Not only did they

¹¹⁶ Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

¹¹⁸ Report of the Housing Committee, 16.12.30., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1930* (London, 1931), 998.

¹¹⁹ C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 3-4.

have to be able to pay the high rent of their new home, but they had to be seen to 'deserve' it too. Some of the tenants were so select, they could even afford their own domestic servants. To suggest that these particular residents were working-class is bordering on the absurd. Even in later years, after the L.C.C.'s realisation that such people did not in fact deserve to be housed at the public's expense, the Council's pride in its show estate and the continuing high rents ensured that Roehampton remained a relatively exclusive place to live; "all in all, this wasn't what you would really call a common cockney estate."¹²⁰

Watling on the other hand contained houses that were both more affordable to the various sectors of the working class and more readily let to them by the L.C.C. Although it was not designated as a slum clearance estate, to an extent it did serve this purpose, and many tenants were undoubtedly very poor. If one thing is certain, it is that the degree of selectivity evident in the Council's allocation of properties on Roehampton was not duplicated. In the view of one Watling resident, "we were rough and ready Londoners and quite working-class, poor people."¹²¹

Although Bowley was able to write that tenancies on inter-war estates were "largely confined to a limited range of income groups, that is, in practice, the better-off families, the small clerks, the artisans, the better-off semi-skilled workers with small families and fairly safe jobs," the strata of occupational groups extended in different directions on Roehampton and Watling.¹²² Roehampton's population was weighted more heavily towards white collar workers, whilst Watling's tended more towards the unskilled. To repeat the comments of the 1938 C.H.A.C. Report:

"Inevitably, in most areas, the first municipal tenants were a carefully selected group who but for the War might have been expected to find their own accommodation without any assistance from the State."¹²³

Whereas under the later 1924 Act, local authorities were able:

"to draw upon poorer sections of the population for their tenants. ... There was not the same need to discriminate in the process of selection; a larger

¹²⁰ Interview with Mrs. Power.

¹²¹ Interview with Mrs. E. Lewington.

¹²² M. Bowley, *Housing and the State 1919-1944*, 129.

¹²³ C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 3.

number of working class families were able to enjoy the benefits of municipal housing.”¹²⁴

At no time was this more apparent than in the early years of both estates. To summarise the situation in, for instance, 1930 using the records of the L.C.C.: first, Roehampton contained a relatively large proportion of white collar workers, many of whom were middle class, among its tenants in comparison to Watling (approximately thirty-six per cent. as opposed to sixteen per cent); second, Roehampton contained relatively less unskilled tenants in comparison to Watling (roughly seventeen per cent. compared to twenty-nine per cent).¹²⁵

It is important to establish that the occupational structures of the estates differed in this way in order to begin to show that the social composition of Roehampton was unlike that of Watling. In the following chapters, it will be shown that the indications of the class difference that has been suggested here, together with the particular cultures and politics of the people and associations of Roehampton and Watling, were reflected in the discourses of community that were prevalent on the two estates. I begin in the next chapter by contrasting the widely-held view of the inter-war cottage council estates as lacking in community with the views of the residents themselves, who could identify their estates as communities in a number of ways. In comparison to Watling, the Roehampton residents’ discourses of community, I argue, were strongly imbued with middle-class values, most notably a culture of respectability.

¹²⁴ C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 3-4.

¹²⁵ See Tables 3.1 and 3.2.



Figure 3.1: The Rochampton Estate, 1927
 (Source: G.L.R.O.)

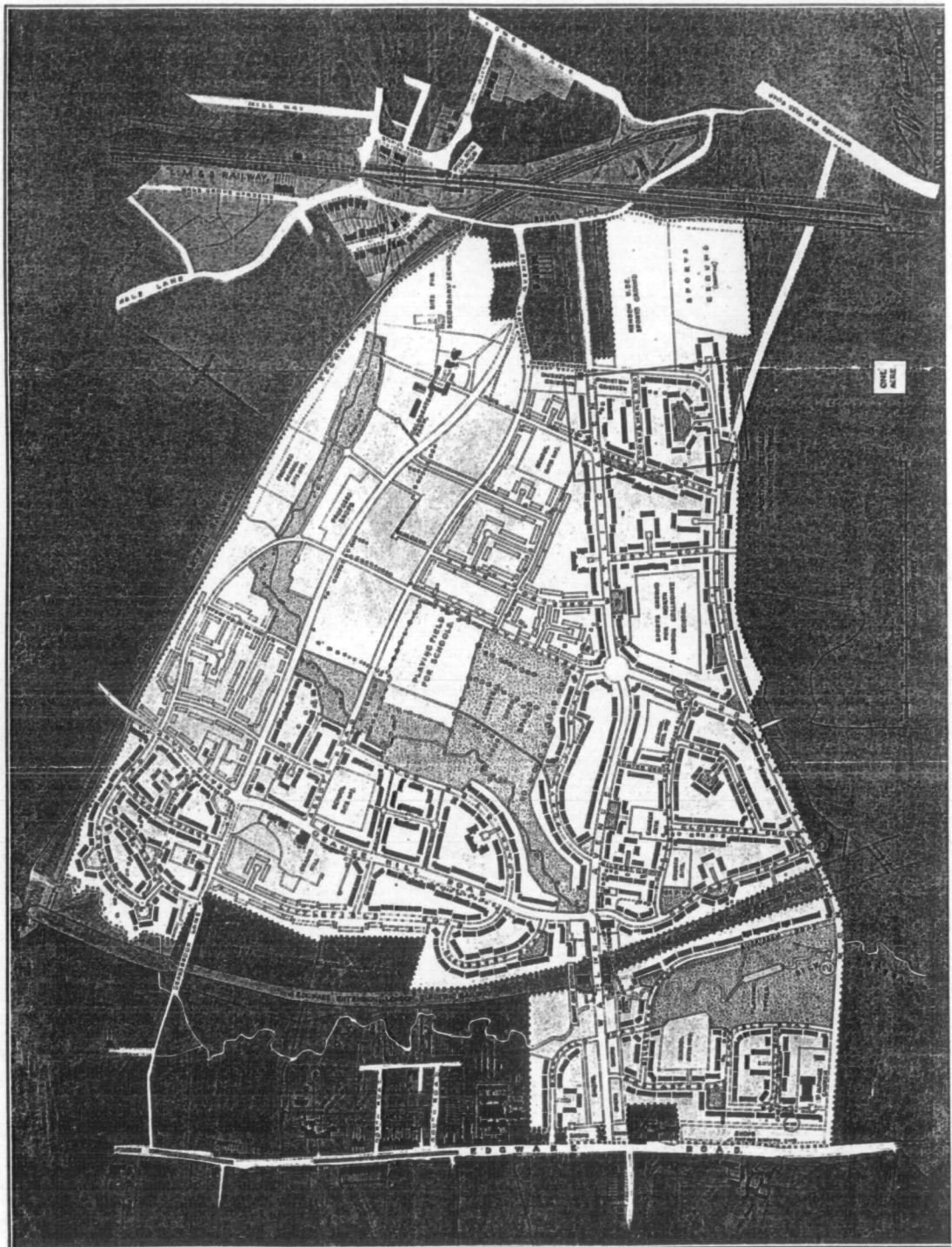


Figure 3.2: The Watling Estate, 1927
(Source: G.L.R.O.)



Plate 3.1: Louie Francis outside the family's steel-framed house in Littlefield Road, Watling, c.1929.
(Source: Mrs. Y. Ryall)



Plate 3.2: Timber-framed houses in Thirleby Road, Watling, 1927
(Source: G.L.R.O.)

Table 3.1: Occupational Structure of Roehampton, 1930-1939

	1930		1939		Change 1930-39	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
White Collar						
Skilled	452	36.5	256	21.1	-196	-15.4
Unskilled	413	33.4	533	44	120	10.6
Miscellaneous	213	17.2	306	25.2	93	8
	160	12.9	118	9.7	-42	-3.2
Total	1238	100	1213	100		

Table 3.2: Occupational Structure of Watling, 1930-1939

	1930		1939		Change 1930-39	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
White Collar						
Skilled	642	15.5	353	8.8	-289	-6.7
Unskilled	2126	51.4	1924	47.7	-202	-3.7
Miscellaneous	1187	28.7	1264	31.4	77	2.7
	180	4.4	489	12.1	309	7.7
Total	4135	100	4030	100		

N = Number

Source: L.C.C., *Housing Estates: Statistics for the Year 1929-30* (London, 1930) 18-9 and L.C.C., *Housing Estates: Statistics for the Year 1938-39* (London, 1939) 57-8.

CHAPTER FOUR - MYTHS OF COMMUNITY MADE CONCRETE.

A. Introduction.

I have described in Chapter One how the cottage council estates of the inter-war years have traditionally been depicted as 'housing deserts devoid of oases of community'. Yet, as I have also shown, the Yeos draw attention to, without elaborating on, residents' forms of 'community created from inside', forms of community that were made by the residents and based on their mutuality. This suggestion of the Yeos that the estates were not, therefore, necessarily devoid of community, from the residents' point of view at least, is expanded upon in this chapter. I want to begin to examine some of the conceptualizations of community that could be articulated by the residents of Roehampton and Watling. In this I am not concerned with conceptualizations of community related to the estates' tenants' and community associations. Those organisations, their conceptualizations of community, and the views held of them by the estates' residents form the basis of Chapters Five and Six. As I have stressed in Chapter One, it is not my aim to assert that the residents' conceptualizations of community were sociographic facts, rather I want to view them as structures of meaning. They can perhaps best be described as myths of community made concrete in the minds of the residents.¹

I begin by re-examining from the standpoint of the residents the conventional wisdom that community was absent from the estates because of the break-up of former inner city 'communities' and the lack of public facilities and recreational amenities provided on the new estates. The first section of this chapter is concerned to show, first, that residents of both Roehampton and Watling generally rejected such conventional wisdom. Second, that in doing so, the residents of each estate began to articulate two different conceptualizations of community. On Watling some residents certainly agreed that they had left communities behind to live on the estate. In comparison to those communities, life on the estate in the early years especially

¹ Thanks to Susan Smith for suggesting this to me after I had presented a paper. 'Contested Concepts of Community on London's Inter-War Cottage Council Estates'. Paper presented at the Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, 13.2.95.

had little to offer in terms of friendship, facilities and opportunities for recreation. This, however, was viewed as only a temporary feature. Watling soon acquired some of the buildings and services that were commonplace in the inner areas of London. It is also argued that the forms of public sociability that these new residents brought with them from the inner areas ensured that what they identified as a sense of community did develop. It became a 'community' where there was much social activity outside of the home. On Roehampton, on the other hand, the move to the estate was rarely seen as a problem. To an extent this was because people could deny that they had been uprooted from a community or that they regretted the disruption of former kinship and friendship networks. More than this, however, the residents of Roehampton articulated a different conceptualization of community than their Watling counterparts, arguing mainly that the facilities that were provided on the estate ensured that people did meet and feelings of community did exist. In comparison to Watling, therefore, this sense of community was limited in the sense that no emphasis was placed on the gregariousness and public sociability of the tenants. The different social compositions of Roehampton and Watling residents are evident in the ways in which different myths of community were made concrete in differing configurations of the public and the private.

The further significance of a mutual aid ethic between the estates' residents to their notions of community is discussed in the second section of this chapter. The Yeos suggest this was frequently an important aspect, but in distinction to their views, I want to show that ideals of community based on mutuality were not necessarily restricted solely to the working class. Although the tenants of Roehampton and Watling differed in terms of their class nature, this was not reflected in their views of the importance of informal, mutual support networks as a part of their community. The situation is complex, however, since at the same time many of the Roehampton residents appeared to limit the extent of the support and help they would offer others, preferring instead a privatised, home and family-oriented lifestyle. Developing the point made in the previous section then, not merely did the Roehampton residents fail to attribute any importance to gregariousness and public sociability within their conceptualizations of community,

but they also welcomed a focus inwards upon their own household and nuclear family. This significant difference in the conceptualization of community between the two estates I attribute to the greater proportion of middle-class tenants on Roehampton.

In the third section of this chapter, the perception and treatment of Roehampton and Watling by their surrounding areas, and the effects of this on the residents' communal sensibilities, are examined. Clear differences between Watling and Roehampton arise here once again, due, in part at least, to the middle class, or at least highly 'respectable' nature, of many of the latter estate's residents. Many of those who lived around Watling did not view the estate positively. To them its imagined geography was as a problem area both socially and politically. As such there was fierce antagonism from the area's established private residents to their new neighbours. The effect of this was to distinguish Watling in the eyes of its own residents from the surrounding areas, and thus reinforce their communal sensibility. The imagining of Roehampton, however, was more positive. To the surrounding neighbourhood, the estate appeared as a model cottage estate whose tenants, deemed desirable by the L.C.C., were respectable neighbours. Hostility to the estate was rare therefore, especially in comparison to Watling. Feelings of the Roehampton residents that the estate was the community to which they belonged, rather than the wider area, were less sensitised.

In the fourth section of the chapter, I draw attention to the dangers of romanticizing Roehampton and Watling as 'communities'. Certainly, many residents were able to identify themselves as having lived in communities. I do not want to suggest, however, that estate life of the 1930s was some form of golden age of supportive social relations to which it is desirable to return. Most notably, life on the estates had a distinctly patriarchal nature, in the form of both domestic violence and a sexual division of space and labour, a division that was not advantageous to women. Further, the actual conceptualizations of community articulated by the residents were based upon an unequal power relationship between the sexes. The informal support networks between the residents, which were of considerable importance to their conceptualizations of community, were largely dependent on

female sacrifice, and frequently of benefit to the male population. Bearing in mind the emotive power of community then, it is suggested that the residents' identification of their estates as communities may to an extent have masked and legitimized the patriarchal social relations which existed.

In conclusion, I draw these themes together to highlight the simplicity of the generalisation that the inter-war cottage council estates were lacking in community. Both Watling and Roehampton, it is stressed, could be imagined as communities by their residents. These imaginings, however, were very much dependent upon the specific social-historical and geographical circumstances of each estate. Given that these circumstances differed between Roehampton and Watling, the conceptualizations of community differed too. On each of the estates the myth of community that was formed in the minds of the residents was shaped by the context provided by their material and social lives.

B. Communities In The Country.

The intention of this section is to explore the thoughts of the residents of Roehampton and Watling on the ways in which their estates have traditionally been depicted by writers, ranging from Durant in the late thirties to Thompson in the early nineties, as lacking in community. From the material I presented in Chapter One describing life on the inter-war estates, and highlighting in particular the lack of community, two notable themes are readily apparent.

First, the areas of inner London that people, "in spite of fears at the prospect", moved from are portrayed as formidably close-knit communities of friends and family.² These "old communities" were not moved en masse to the new estates, however.³ Roehampton was in no sense used as a slum clearance estate and its initial tenants were drawn from various areas in the County of London, while later tenants could only move in individually when properties scattered around the estate became vacant. On Watling, although many of the residents were drawn from St.

² See A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 5-6.

³ M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, 28.

Pancras and Islington, there were others from different parts of London too. Moreover, “if a large number of people did come from the same area they were separated.”⁴ This was especially the case with the poorer tenants, viewed by the Chairman of the L.C.C. Housing Committee, Colonel C.B. Levita, as responsible for the slum conditions in which they lived.⁵ The L.C.C. preferred to place them “in limited numbers amongst tenants of a better class” in the hope that “their home conditions improved.”⁶ As, for instance, the Central Housing Advisory Committee explained, it was best:

“to separate bad tenants from each other and to place them as neighbours of clean, careful tenants who can be relied upon to set a good example. ... The bad tenant will learn more readily by eye than by ear; example is better than precept.”⁷

Frequently, therefore, people found that “they were all total strangers” to each other;⁸ “they didn’t know a soul.”⁹ In fact only one resident from both estates, Miss Morrell who moved to Roehampton in 1927, was able to tell me that her family had some friends already living on the estate, while her father also knew the man who lived opposite.¹⁰ As such, we are told that the cottage estates of *Semi-Detached London*:

“presented a stark contrast to the gregarious warmth of the crowded tenements or close-packed terraces their tenants had known since childhood.”¹¹

Second, the re-creation of community on the new estates was reliant on public buildings, facilities and amenities.

“A community ... requires playing fields, and a group of public buildings, churches, schools, a shopping centre and a community hall in a centralised position.”¹²

⁴ R. Frankenburg, *Communities in Britain: Social Life in Town and Country* (Harmondsworth, 1977), 204.

⁵ C.B. Levita, ‘Slum Areas in London’. Lecture delivered to the London Society, 8.2.24. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/2/22.

⁶ Report of the Housing Committee, 26.1.26.

⁷ See C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 24-6.

⁸ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

⁹ Interview with Ms. W.M. Haigh by the author, 28.6.94.

¹⁰ Interview with Miss Morrell.

¹¹ A.A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*, 159.

Not all of these had been provided, however. As I noted in the previous chapter, on both Roehampton and Watling there were, for instance, no libraries, swimming pools or pubs. Further, building on the estates was frequently unfinished when people moved in. On Watling, for instance, the first doctor had to live in a caravan until his house was finished.¹³ Mr. Payne, the estate clerk, highlighted some of the other problems the early tenants faced:

“All sorts of teething problems had to be dealt with - the underground station was only a temporary building with wooden steps up to road level, shops were built only on one side of Watling Avenue and the shops in Deansbrook Road had still to be built, wayleaves for letter boxes and telephone booths, electricity sub-stations and telephone poles had to be granted, etc. Sites were required for schools.”¹⁴

With facilities lacking, or at best being provided only slowly, therefore, the estates were not seen as “self-contained communities”, and for some commentators this was considered to be “the greatest failure of the local authority house-building programme between the wars.”¹⁵ The estates, to quote Thompson once more, were “housing deserts devoid of oases of community.”¹⁶

As I have described in the previous chapter, however, the move to the estates was still generally welcomed in view of the improved environment that it ensured. A new house in suburban, if not rural, surroundings did indeed present a stark contrast to the overcrowded and unhealthy lodgings people had left behind. The recollection of Miss Morrell, that her mother “didn’t mind moving at all, she couldn’t get there [Roehampton] quick enough,” was far from unusual, for, as other residents put it, the houses were like a palace, and people thought they were in Heaven.¹⁷ Beyond this, however, people’s reactions were complex.

¹² University of Liverpool, Department of Social Science, *Population Problems of New Estates with Special Reference to Norris Green* (Liverpool, 1939), 48.

¹³ E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, *Watling Community Association*, 2.

¹⁴ Interview with Mr. Payne.

¹⁵ M.J. Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, 28.

¹⁶ F.M.L. Thompson, ‘Town and City’, 80-1.

(i) *Watling*.

The suggestion of writers such as Daunton that the people who came to live on the inter-war cottage council estates were forced to leave behind family, friends, facilities and hence community in the inner areas from which they moved has clearly been well-rehearsed within academic writing on municipal housing. To an extent it also has some popular basis for it was reiterated by some of the Watling residents.

The people there frequently chose to describe themselves, or their parents, as 'Londoners' who had found the move from London out to Watling difficult to say the least. The estate was nine miles from central London, and although travel times were progressively reduced during the following years by transport improvements, Watling was considered to be far removed. In fact it was thought to be out in the country, and although this aspect was soon also reduced as London's suburbia continued to spread and the estate was absorbed within a fully developed residential and industrial area, the initial rural environment was not to everybody's liking.¹⁸

"My mother was a Londoner, well they all were, and when I got to 14 and I had a job in London, mum said let's all move back to London because you're all working in London. ... Londoners like mum, you know she really wanted to go back."¹⁹

"My father, who was a Londoner, was very annoyed about it. He thought going to Watling was like burying oneself in the country."²⁰

"My husband thought it was terrible. He never hardly spoke to me for about six weeks. ... When he came down, he said 'God forsaken hole this is, miles away from anywhere'. He was a town man, you see."²¹

Part of the problem was clearly that Watling was seen as distant from the districts that people had left behind, and the residents felt isolated from their former friends and neighbours. Possibly alone at home during the day while the other members of the family were either at school or work, this appears to have been felt most by women. Ruth Durant certainly believed that "loneliness pressed on the

¹⁷ Interview with Miss Morrell.

¹⁸ See R. Durant, *Watling*, 50.

¹⁹ Mrs. H. Goodman. Interview with Mrs. H. Goodman and Mr. A. Goodman by the author, 9.6.94.

²⁰ Recollection of Amy Ewell, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 26.

²¹ Interview with Mrs. E. Knight by the author, 2.8.94.

women more than then men.”²² Mary Millbank, for instance, commented on this when she recalled that when the family moved from Kings Cross, her mother:

“Missed her friends and was very depressed. ... She said she would sooner leave as she was missing her friends. ... It even got to the stage when Mother wouldn’t eat.”²³

Violet Bunyan also recalled also that her mother felt much the same. The thought of leaving her neighbours and friends was sufficient for her to turn down three offers from the L.C.C. of a house on Watling. The fourth offer she did accept, but only under pressure from the other members of the family:

“She didn’t want to leave her neighbours, her friends. I think the country, she thought of it as the country, frightened the life out of her. ... In the end she had to come out, we forced her out there, but she was never happy, never happy. She missed Islington, she missed her friends.”²⁴

Not only were the settlers of Watling physically distant from their old friends, however. Living on a cottage estate laid out at a low density meant that their new neighbours were fewer and also physically more distant. Mrs. Knight, for instance, recalled that on the day she moved to Watling nobody passed the house, and reflecting upon this her husband remarked, before falling silent again, that “you could die here, nobody would know.”²⁵ This was in contrast, of course, to the overcrowded terraces and tenements where people had previously lived in London.

“When you lived in the flats you had balconies all the way round. And you used to walk round your balcony and you’d always be walking past someone’s street door which was open, which they all were.”²⁶

“... but on an estate you were more spread out and I think people felt they were out in the wilds. Mother had been used to living in a block of flats, a very close community.”²⁷

The lack of facilities, particularly shops, on the estate was a problem too. The early tenants usually had to walk to Edgware to do their normal shopping. For larger items, they needed to travel by tram to Cricklewood, which was no mean

²² R. Durant, *Watling*, 26-7.

²³ Recollection of Mary Millbank, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 51.

²⁴ Interview with Mrs. Bunyan.

²⁵ Interview with Mrs. Knight.

²⁶ Interview with Mrs. Bunyan.

undertaking for “it was a day out, you know, to go there.”²⁸ Again, this was a feature of the rural aspect of Watling that contrasted with London. Mr. Barker’s family, for instance, was one of the first ten to be living on Watling, and as he put it:

“My mother wasn’t too happy because in Marylebone we were just down the road from Selfridges. But when you got out to the Watling it was just fields plus fields.”²⁹

Another charge also levelled at Watling was that there were few, if any, leisure activities. In Mr. Barker’s words, “the only social that you got I suppose was the milkman.”³⁰ This was a reason, Leslie Wisdan recalled, that people had given for moving back to London. In his view, however, what they meant was that “there wasn’t a pub on every corner”, and certainly the people I spoke to did frequently berate the absence of a pub on the estate:³¹

“There was no, there was no means of going to have a drink like the families used to in London. That was part of your community. Its like Coronation Street now.”³²

In the new surroundings of Watling then, people could feel “somewhat lost” for it was a complete change from the busy, built-up areas of London that they were used to, the central districts where there were “lots of shops and lots of people.”³³ As Yvonne Ryall put it, Watling was “quiet” and she “didn’t like it at all.”³⁴ This was an aspect of life on the estate that Durant was especially critical of. To convey in a nutshell her view of the problem of “the social need on new estates”, she began her book with the following anecdote:

“One afternoon in the autumn of 1927, early in the history of the Watling Estate, a woman banged loudly at the door of her neighbour. When it was opened she cried out: ‘What has happened?’ ‘Why,’ said her neighbour,

²⁷ Recollection of Mrs. V. Bunyan, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 25.

²⁸ Interview with Mrs. Ryall.

²⁹ Mr. Barker. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

³⁰ Mr. Barker. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

³¹ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

³² Mr. Barker. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

³³ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

³⁴ Interview with Mrs. Ryall.

‘what should have happened: what is the matter?’ ‘Everything is so terribly quiet,’ said the first woman, still frightened to death.”³⁵

The story is perhaps something of an exaggeration, but nevertheless it is clear that some residents of Watling did at least have misgivings about living there. They viewed their new home as buried in the country and away from old friends and neighbours. Their new ones were few and far between, plus there was a lack of shops and no social life except for the milkman. For these people life on Watling obviously involved some sacrifices. To some of the residents, these sacrifices amounted to a lack of community on the estate, particularly in comparison to their old homes and neighbourhoods.

This was the case in spite of the considerable improvement in living conditions that a move to the estate ensured. The reluctance of Violet Bunyan’s mother to move to Watling has already been noted, yet Mrs. Bunyan vividly remembered the overcrowded and poorly equipped flat in Islington where the family had previously lived. She had shared her parents’ bedroom, her two brothers had slept in a makeshift bed in the kitchen, and similarly her sister in the living room. There had been no electricity nor gas. The family had washed in the local public baths for there was no bathroom either. The place was also plagued by bugs.³⁶

Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond, talking about when their parents moved to the estate, succinctly summed up the choice some residents obviously felt they were making.

Mr. Barker: “Our greatest thrill as a family was to have the garden. That was our greatest thrill. And our own front door. And a bedroom of our own.”

Mr. Symmond: “It must have been paradise for them after what they were used to.”

Mr. Barker: “Yes, but they missed their community, didn’t they? The friendship was there [Marylebone], that counteracted the way you lived. ... And the company was there. But coming out to the Watling you missed the company, but you had the fresh air.”³⁷

³⁵ R. Durant, *Watling*, 1.

³⁶ Interview with Mrs. Bunyan.

³⁷ Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

At first sight then, Durant would appear to have had some justification in writing that Watling was populated by isolated human beings, who had been forced to retreat into “exclusive domesticity”; that Watling exposed “the loneliness of urban people and the paucity of their institutions”; and that Watling did not look like “a traditional community of people.”³⁸ However, although some of the residents could indeed be critical of Watling in a similar fashion, and argue that there was a lack of community, the majority of them also insisted that if this was the case, then it was merely temporary.

As I have described in the previous chapter, Watling was soon furnished with what were considered some of the basic amenities and services of urban life, with the exception of a pub, so reducing the contrast between the estate and the areas of inner London people had left. The cinemas close to the estate became extremely popular, as elsewhere in the 1930s.³⁹ The schools, churches and shops were all eventually built too. By 1931, the *Hendon Times*’ regular columnist on Watling affairs, known as the Rover, reported that Watling Avenue, “the street of adventure”, could provide “practically everything for the larder and the home.”⁴⁰ According to *The Watling Resident*, it also resembled a traditional London market.

“A few itinerant pedlars are standing on the kerb; mock auctions are attracting large groups; the display of goods debouches on to the wide pavement as if in an Eastern bazaar. Here all the diverse delights of Islington, Hoxton and Somers Town are to be experienced.”⁴¹

The residents also proved adept at providing their own forms of leisure and entertainment. The estate’s largest sports society, for instance, was the Watling United Sports Club run mainly by the Staniford and Lewinton families.⁴² Placing teams in the local leagues, its membership in 1937 was over three hundred.⁴³ It comprised many sections, including football, cricket, tennis, swimming, athletics,

³⁸ R. Durant, *Watling*, 117.

³⁹ H. Cunningham, ‘Leisure and culture’, in F.M.L. Thompson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950. Volume 2*, 311-2. J. Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace* (London, 1984).

⁴⁰ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 23.10.31., 7.

⁴¹ *The Watling Resident* 4 (8) (December 1931), 7.

⁴² *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 15.10.37., 7.

⁴³ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 30.5.37., 7.

physical and Swedish drill, and netball. (See Plate 4.1). Annual summer camps were held at West Mersey, Essex.⁴⁴ (See Plates 4.2 & 4.3). Its social activities were vibrant also. Originally the Watling Labour Sports Club, it had become an independent club in 1932 when its parent body wanted to claim the money it was generating from the socials and dances it held in the local schools halls.⁴⁵ Typically, over two hundred members and friends were attending these evenings.⁴⁶ There was the annual dinner dance at the Brent Bridge Hotel too; “we used to have a fine old time.”⁴⁷

Also notable was the Burnt Oak and District Old Comrades’ Association (O.C.A.). An ex-servicemen’s club, this was set up in 1928 to “further the social activities and continue the spirit of fellowship which was so paramount during the Great War.”⁴⁸ Its activities included concerts, whist drives, club nights, and dinners, where the “intention was simply to give members, friends and supporters a good night’s entertainment.”⁴⁹ Acclaimed as both the association responsible for “cementing more friendships than any other in the district” and the “strongest, well-established and happiest organisation on the Watling Estate”, the O.C.A. was popular.⁵⁰ A dance at Goldbeaters School in December 1929, for instance, attracted four hundred people.⁵¹ As a Mrs. Hathaway declared at the annual dinner in 1936:

“The ladies always looked forward to each event. ... It provided everyone with the opportunity of getting to know each other.”⁵²

Moreover, Watling’s residents rather than exhibiting a “strong inhibition against mixing freely with their neighbours”, could display a far more outgoing

⁴⁴ Interview with Mrs. F. Lewinton by the author, 29.7.94. See also *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 29.1.32., 7.

⁴⁵ Interview with Mrs. Lewinton. See also *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 16.12.32., 9.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 29.1.32., 7; and *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 24.3.33., 9; and 20.4.34., 6.

⁴⁷ Interview with Mrs. Lewinton.

⁴⁸ *The Watling Resident* 1 (12) (April 1929), 302-3; and *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 21.6.29., 13.

⁴⁹ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 7.2.30., 12; and 26.9.30., 9.

⁵⁰ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 10.5.35., 19; and 18.9.36., 8.

⁵¹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 6.12.29., 14.

⁵² *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 20.11.36., 8.

nature than Durant gave them credit for.⁵³ A repeated image evoked by the residents was that although people did not know one another initially, being gregarious Londoners sent to a strange place, they were only too willing to “turn outwards to socialise.”⁵⁴

“As-you-do Londoners they spoke to each other and that’s how you build up conversation and that’s how you build up friendship.”⁵⁵

“You had to mix, you were only too pleased to talk to people because this wasn’t so, quite, didn’t seem quite so densely populated as where you used to live. And of course if you’re a Londoner, you’re always ready to communicate.”⁵⁶

The residents, therefore, did not just know one another, occasionally venturing out from their exclusive domesticity to talk in the queues at the post office, nod to a familiar face outside the cinema, or dance with their partner at a social evening in Goldbeaters School, rather there was also a great deal of public sociability and street activity. Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond, for instance, stressed to me that they used to sit out in their gardens by the front door, with the key always hanging from the letter box, “and say hello to everybody that walked by, and they knew you.”⁵⁷ Leslie Wisdan made the same point too; “an awful lot of time was spent stopping in the street and talking.”⁵⁸ Further, Ms. Haigh recalled the “terrific parties” in the flats where she had lived.

“We all used to go into each other’s places. And you know, so they’d get on the old piano. And nobody seemed to worry in those days about those sort of parties and sometimes they’d dance in the street ‘til about one in the morning.”⁵⁹

Feelings of community soon developed on Watling, therefore. With great affection George Todd, for instance, specifically recalled that Mostyn Road, the street he lived in, quickly developed into a community, with the communal feeling rooted in warm notions of the residents’ friendship and trust. (See Plate 4.4).

⁵³ R. Durant, *Watling*, 118.

⁵⁴ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

⁵⁵ Mr. Barker. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

⁵⁶ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

⁵⁷ Mr. Symmond. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

⁵⁹ Interview with Ms. Haigh.

“No we didn’t know anybody, but it was so wonderful in them days that you soon knew people. If you imagine the cul-de-sac it was like a banjo, and that was a nice community you know. Everybody, well people had their keys behind the door and you used to pull a piece of string and go in. And to the next. You know the sort of thing. There was no criminals around, nothing like that, nothing nasty you know. It was you know wonderful days.”⁶⁰

The stability of Watling’s population was also cited by residents as a factor in this development of community, although this may owe more to personal memory than the estate’s demographic history. In the years 1927 to 1936, 3,900 families left the estate - a figure approaching the total number of households Watling contained.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Violet Bunyan was insistent when she recalled that:

“You did know your neighbours then and people did stay. And this is where you get your community, because people did stay together and they got to know each other. I mean this road when I moved in here, there wasn’t a house along this road that I couldn’t go into and have a cup of tea. And there’s not a house that they wouldn’t come into me. ... Everybody knew everybody, and everybody’s house was open to everybody.”⁶²

Not everyone subscribed to, or was encompassed within, this conceptualization of community, however. First, Mrs. Lewington suggested that anti-semitism might have excluded any Jewish residents:

“They minded a little bit if they were Jewish.”⁶³

Such racist overtones to community in the inter-war period, however, were limited for as Mr. Payne put it, “there was no racial element on the Estate in those days.”⁶⁴ Second, it would be untrue to claim that all the residents of Watling were always friendly and gregarious. Inevitably some were, if not hostile, then at the very least reclusive. Leslie Wisdan, for instance, recalled that the family who lived next but one never spoke to any members of his family for over thirty years.⁶⁵ Indeed, as might only be expected some residents had arguments, and in some cases resolved to settle their disputes violently.

⁶⁰ Interview with Mr. G. Todd by the author, 16.6.94.

⁶¹ R. Durant, *Watling*, 16.

⁶² Interview with Mrs. Bunyan.

⁶³ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mr. Payne.

⁶⁵ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

“I mean there was a lot of, lot of rows took place undoubtedly, particularly over the kids. I mean to see two women having a go on the doorstep, or out on the street come to that, pulling each other’s hair, wasn’t that uncommon a sight.”⁶⁶

For instance, as the *Hendon and Finchley Times* reported, in a style I will comment on later:

“Street fight - two women neighbours in Watling scene.”⁶⁷

“A Watling quarrel - two families appear before the magistrates.”⁶⁸

“Watling Man Assaulted - hit in the eye by neighbour who called him from bed.”⁶⁹

“Watling News - Doorstep Scene - Next-Door Neighbours Take Their Troubles to Hendon Police Court - ‘Made His Life A Misery’.”⁷⁰

Third, the need to travel to and from work in London could mean that there was not much time left for socialising. Although only one resident of those that I spoke to, Yvonne Ryall who worked in Oxford Street, mentioned this as an issue, her account does indeed evoke images of Durant’s representation of Watling as “not much more than a huge hotel without a roof.”⁷¹

“I was working all the time you see. So when I came home in the evening, I mean I worked till half-past five, six in the evening, so it was 7 o’clock by the time I got home, and by the time you’d had a meal you didn’t go out far, see. And I mean when I retired from work I had no friends around here because I didn’t know anybody.”⁷²

Even granting these important exceptions, it is necessary to question Durant’s argument that Watling was a community in its early years when the tenants were adjusting together to their new way of life on the estate, but thereafter “lost much of its earlier resemblance to a traditional community of people” as “communal enthusiasm” waned.⁷³ Most of the residents that I spoke to tended to suggest the opposite. On moving to the estate they knew nobody and they found that the

⁶⁶ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

⁶⁷ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 7.9.28., 9.

⁶⁸ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 13.9.29., 8.

⁶⁹ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 11.9.31., 11.

⁷⁰ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 3.5.35., 7.

⁷¹ R. Durant, *Watling*, 119.

⁷² Interview with Mrs. Ryall.

⁷³ R. Durant, *Watling*, 116, 42-3.

facilities of central London to which they were accustomed were missing. It was then, in the first few years when the estate was still developing, that they believed that Watling was not a community. Communal life, however, soon developed. As Mr. Barker phrased it, “the times were hard because it was taking you from one environment to another, but we learned to live with it until the community grew up around us.”⁷⁴ It was a community that reflected residents’ friendships, gregarious nature and the public forms of sociability which they had brought with them from the working-class areas of inner London.⁷⁵

(ii) *Roehampton.*

The residents of Roehampton provided further reasons to doubt the conventional wisdom that the cottage council estates were housing deserts devoid of oases of community in comparison to the areas where the residents had previously lived. In terms of an absence of community, moving to the estate was not seen as particularly traumatic. To an extent, the departure from existing ‘communities’ in the inner areas could be disputed. At the very least, the distancing of family and friends was not always considered disadvantageous. More than this, however, the residents rarely chose to describe Roehampton as featureless and therefore lacking in community. Conversely, articulating a conceptualization of community rather more limited than that apparent on Watling, where gregariousness and public sociability were so common, the estate school and shops were rather identified as of crucial importance to the presence of community.

Of the residents that I spoke to not everyone agreed that they had left old communities behind when they had moved to Roehampton. Frank Hibbert, for instance, although he agreed that former friends and relatives were reluctant to travel out to the estate to visit, threw sociological wisdom out of the window, when he told me that “if you lived scattered around in Pimlico and Victoria, there was no real

⁷⁴ Mr. Barker. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

⁷⁵ J. White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End tenement block 1887-1920* (London, 1980), 69-72. For an earlier period see B. Bramwell, ‘Public space and local communities: the example of Birmingham, 1840-1880’, in C.W.J. Withers & G. Kearns (Eds.), *Urbanising Britain: Essays on Class and Community in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1991), 31-54.

close community there.”⁷⁶ Others, such as Leslie Parsons, originally from Peabody buildings in Westminster, did not see the increased distance between family and friends as a particular problem. Admittedly, the estate “must have seemed like the other end of the Earth” to his parents, yet this was “purely and simply to do with the problems of having to go to town to work.”⁷⁷ While for Margaret Murphy, it “was only a question of a bus ride” from Roehampton if she wanted to visit old friends and family in East Hill, Wandsworth.⁷⁸

For Ivy Woollett’s mother the move away from the extended family was positively welcomed. Her description of the family’s living arrangements prior to moving to Roehampton in 1923 was similar to those lauded as traditional and desirable by Young and Willmott in their contrast between life in Bethnal Green and ‘Greenleigh’, a post-World War II L.C.C. housing estate.⁷⁹ In Paddington, her mother and father had lived on the top floor of a three-storey house, with her grandmother on the floor below, and her great-grandmother down below her.⁸⁰ Rather than being open, warm and supportive, however, life in the house was fraught with tension:

“My nan, being my dad’s mother, her mother-in-law, I mean she was typical. She used to pick on my mum if she could.”⁸¹

“It can’t have been easy for her living with her mother-in-law, who was always nagging her, and my grandfather and great-grandfather.”⁸²

For instance, there were arguments over the upbringing of the children. Similarly, if on washday her mother:

“hadn’t hearthstoned the copper and left it how it should have been and cleaned the fire and done it all, oh goodness, she used to nag for weeks, you know.”⁸³

⁷⁶ Interview with Mr. Hibbert.

⁷⁷ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

⁷⁸ Interview with Miss M.C. Murphy by the author, 29.4.94.

⁷⁹ See M. Young & P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Harmondsworth, 1977).

⁸⁰ Interview with Mrs. Woollett.

⁸¹ Recollection of Mrs. I. Woollett, in Putney and Roehampton Organisation of Pensioners, *We Survived* (London, 1988), 19.

⁸² Recollection of Mrs. Woollett, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 5.

⁸³ Recollection of Mrs. Woollett, in P.R.O.P. *We Survived*, 18-9.

Far from fearing the move to Roehampton and the weakening of family and kinship ties, her mother “was so glad to get away from Paddington.”⁸⁴

The move to Roehampton then was for some residents at least not as traumatic, in terms of the disruption of old ‘communities’, as has traditionally been described. In addition to this, however, they emphasised that they were moving to a community. Although the provision of facilities and amenities on their new estates was limited, some were still able to argue that it ensured that Roehampton was a community. Mr. Hibbert, for instance, having told me that there was no community in Pimlico, insisted that “certainly at Roehampton it did exist.”⁸⁵ He emphasised the significance of Huntingfield Road School and the shops bordering the Upper Richmond Road when he elaborated on how Roehampton was:

“a closer community with the children all [at] one school, and going to the school, and of course you came home with them, and they lived next door and all around you. A closer community, with shops, the one row of shops at the bottom there.”⁸⁶

Other residents echoed these sentiments. Mr. Parsons, for instance, did not see the estate as lacking facilities, although a football pitch would have been appreciated. Rather it was the central areas where there had been “probably no facilities or limited facilities.”⁸⁷ He explained the importance of the “more personalised” shops to me:

“These people that used to serve the goods to us were friends. They became people that you liked to be with, you know you liked to know them. All great friends. You knew about their families. Everybody knew their families. They knew all your family and what was going on.”⁸⁸

In his view the estate was a community, and he too evoked one of the quintessential positive images of this when he insisted that an important part of my history should be that:

“People left their doors open, their back doors open. You didn’t have to worry then you see. There was no problem. I, I mean I was quite young I know, but I don’t ever remember hearing of any problems whatsoever,

⁸⁴ Recollection of Mrs. Woollett, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 24.

⁸⁵ Interview with Mr. Hibbert.

⁸⁶ Interview with Mr. Hibbert.

⁸⁷ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

⁸⁸ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

anywhere here. People could come and go and nobody even thought about locking you back door, it just wasn't done."⁸⁹

As for the school, Margaret Newman emphasised that, although a few children went to the church school in Roehampton Village, most of the children grew up together going to Huntingfield Road. As a result, she said, there was "a feeling that you belonged to the estate, certainly as children, they were all your friends."⁹⁰

In the words of two other residents:

"Going to the local school you got to know the children and their parents. We knew all the families around the [Lysons] Walk and they were very integrated."⁹¹

"All the children on the estate went to Huntingfield Rd school up to the age of 11 yrs (now closed, I hear) so it was a real community as we all knew each other and grew up together between the wars."⁹²

The great deal of warmth and importance attached to the estate school was further reflected by the frequent description of its recent closure as a "disgrace" or a "shame".

Beyond simply instilling a feeling of belonging to the estate's children, however, the school also acted as a meeting place for the adults of the estate:

"The school was used for quite a lot of organisations that used to meet as a centre there. Yes, there were quite a number. ... that used to be used quite a lot."⁹³

The local Labour and Conservative parties and the Primrose League, for instance, all held weekly whist drives and dances at the school.⁹⁴ Recalling this, Miss Morrell insisted that "everybody sort of knew everybody else sort of thing ... the estate was definitely a community."⁹⁵

As on Watling, a crucial factor within these Roehampton residents' communal sensibility was the feeling that although people generally did not know one another to begin with, the stability and nature of Roehampton's population

⁸⁹ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

⁹⁰ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

⁹¹ Interview with Mrs. Connelly.

⁹² Letter from Mrs. Noon.

⁹³ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

⁹⁴ Letter from Miss N. Morrell to the author, 25.4.94.

⁹⁵ Interview with Miss Morrell.

ensured that they soon did. Although the wealthiest tenants were ‘invited’ to leave Roehampton during the 1930s, it was the L.C.C.’s concern to ensure that they were replaced with people who would still be able to afford to stay there, people with regular jobs and guaranteed wages. Further, residents also tended to have “their whole existence in the area” since, for instance, “it was the very unusual family that went off to the seaside for a holiday.”⁹⁶ As Margaret Newman told me, therefore:

“There was this certainty and security. ... We had this very stable, very secure community.”⁹⁷

For these residents Roehampton was *not* particularly lacking in community. Rather, the shops and the school enabled them to meet other people and develop friendships and warm notions of fellowship. The stability of the estate helped to cement these feelings. These features of social life ensured that there was a communal sensibility. The people of Roehampton viewed their estate as a community in that the “parents all knew each other, and the kids at school.”⁹⁸

It needs to be pointed out, however, that this almost idyllic representation of Roehampton could be disputed too. Ivy Woollett, for instance, although seeing the estate as a community, also believed that there was a lack of activities for teenagers:

“When we grew up, when we were in our teens, there was absolutely nothing on our estate for us to do. No clubs, no nothing! St. Margaret’s Church eventually did have a girls’ friendly society and you could go round there once a week but it wasn’t a club as such.”⁹⁹

Further, Frank Hibbert’s mother clearly did not feel the same way as her son about community in both Pimlico and Roehampton. In terms of religion at the very least, she did not agree that the estate was a closer community than Pimlico:

“There wasn’t much of a religious community when we came to the Roehampton Estate. Back in Pimlico, where we used to live, it was quite different. Although we were in town, our children went to Sunday School. The curate and his sisters used to call and you were like one big happy family. ... our new vicar, I never even knew his name.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

⁹⁷ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

⁹⁸ Interview with Mrs. Woollett.

⁹⁹ Recollection of Mrs. Woollett, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 79.

¹⁰⁰ Recollection of Mrs. Hibbert, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 85.

Different views on exactly what ingredients it took to make a community, and the degree to which these were present on Roehampton, made for different assessments of whether the estate was a 'community' or not. However, as on Watling, the prevalent view that the Roehampton residents held of their estate was in contrast to sociological wisdom. Generally, the Roehampton estate was viewed as a community.

(iii) Conclusion.

Moving from the central districts of London to the estates of Watling and Roehampton on its outskirts did not generally mean a future life devoid of feelings of community. Admittedly, on Watling it was noticeable that the lack of facilities and the break-up of former social networks could be viewed disadvantageously. For some residents these features outweighed the benefits of life on the estate and they were unhappy to be living there. Missing their friends and bemoaning Watling's initial lack of the facilities and social pleasures that they had taken for granted in London, they had not envisaged the estate as a community. Usually, however, such drawbacks were only viewed as temporary, for a 'community spirit' soon developed. This was a communal sensibility grounded in the residents' gregarious nature and involving their street activity and public sociability.

The experiences of the Roehampton residents were somewhat different, yet still cast further doubt on sociological wisdom. Moving to the estate was rarely recalled as such a problem as it had been on Watling, both in terms of 'communities' left and the disruption of kinship and friendship networks. It was pointed out in fact that the disruption could be welcomed. More than this, however, the residents were articulating a different conceptualization of community in comparison to the residents of Watling. They argued that the facilities on the estate, that is the shops and the school, ensured that people did meet, become friends, and develop a common identity. In this way, through their friendship, they too viewed Roehampton as a community. In contrast to Watling, therefore, this community was limited. Neither the gregarious nature of the residents nor the presence of street life

and public sociability were articulated as a significant feature of the Roehampton residents' community.

In view of such a conceptualization of community, the less traumatic nature of the move to the estate for the Roehampton residents is more understandable. Community on Roehampton was not so deep-rooted, the residents were, in a sense, 'less demanding' than their Watling counterparts. Placing less emphasis upon the need for public sociability, the much acclaimed warmth and friendliness of the old, inner city areas was not missed to such an extent as it had been on Watling. In the next section of this chapter, after having outlined the further importance of a mutual aid ethic to the residents' conceptualizations of community, I offer an explanation of this limited nature of community on Roehampton in terms of the estate's social structure.

C. Community Amongst The People.

In the preceeding section I have attempted to cast some doubt on the traditional view that the inter-war cottage council estates were completely lacking in community. Although there was no universal agreement amongst the residents that I spoke to, feelings of community were clearly articulated by some of them. On Roehampton, these feelings were centred mostly upon the friendships that developed with the help of the local school and shops. On Watling, community was perhaps more deep-rooted. The residents' communal sensibility was focused not just upon their friendships, but also upon their public sociability and gregarious street activities.

In this second section the further significance of a mutual aid ethic amongst the residents to their conceptualizations of community is examined. For Watling it will be seen that the Yeos were indeed correct to refer to the residents' 'community created from inside'. The residents' informal networks of support were most certainly an important feature of their conceptualizations of community. On Roehampton this was also the case. Although the estate was largely comprised of middle-class and elite working-class tenants, their mutuality was still an important

aspect of their community. Community, however, was once again limited in its scope on Roehampton for although the importance of the residents' mutuality and sense of neighbourliness was often stressed, so too was the point that they were not 'too' neighbourly. Having failed to attach any importance to street life in their conceptualization of community, the Roehampton residents stressed instead the importance of a private, home and family-oriented lifestyle. Rejecting suggestions that this was due to the planning and management of the estate in conjunction with the skilled working class residents' desire to demonstrate that they were respectable by distinguishing themselves from 'rougher' residents still living in the old, inner city, I argue that this was more indicative of the frequently middle-class nature of the estate's tenants.

(i) *Watling.*

For the residents of Watling, informal networks of mutual support were a significant feature of life on the estate in the 1920s and 1930s. The help and support exchanged between people there was warmly recalled by the majority of people that I spoke to:

"You know they used to help one another. It was wonderful spirit."¹⁰¹

"If you wanted something, it was always there for you, don't matter who you went to. ... I mean everybody knew everybody. So if you were short of something you went to any one of them, any one of them would supply you with whatever you needed."¹⁰²

This was not mere nostalgia. The residents were not viewing their past through rose-tinted spectacles for they frequently provided, usually without prompting, specific instances of such mutuality. Elizabeth Lewington, for instance, recalled the help her family were given when she had to stay in hospital. Drawing heavily on the language of the "deep horizontal comradeship" of community, she emphasised the closeness and friendliness of the residents.¹⁰³

"The point is there was a lot of friendliness. And the people, I was ill later on, and a neighbour down there she used to give my eldest boy a dinner.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Mr. Todd.

¹⁰² Mr. Symmond. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

¹⁰³ B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 1983), 16. Quoted in G. Rose, 'Imagining Poplar in the 1920s', 427.

And this person next door, she gave my husband a dinner because I had to go into hospital. And the person down there took two others. And the person at the bottom of my garden got my daughter in a home at the seaside while I was away. Weren't they lovely. ... Oh yes, there was a lot of closeness and friendliness."¹⁰⁴

In cases of death rather than mere illness, the caring between residents was still evident. When a Watling mother and her children were killed in a house fire in 1937, for instance, the tragedy was felt over the whole estate. More than two thousand people attended the funeral.¹⁰⁵ The loss of the children's lives in this instance obviously aroused somewhat exceptional emotions amongst the residents, yet still "one of the commonest things that happened on the estate" was a collection for bereaved families:

"There was always as soon as somebody died, there was always a street wreath, always. Almost invariably, coming from the neighbours. Somebody would always elect themselves, there used to be a lady over the way called Mrs. Gutteridge who used to do it mostly. Somebody would always elect themselves to go around and collect a wreath for the neighbours."¹⁰⁶

On a less morbid note, another example of mutual caring would be when a new family moved in next door. The residents emphasised that they would go around and offer any help that was needed. Thus, when Violet Bunyan arrived on the estate, her neighbours kept her supplied with tea until the house's gas supply was reconnected.¹⁰⁷ The shopkeepers became a part of the mutual aid network too. Beyond just offering credit, Mrs. Lewington recalled the help they gave her when her husband was unemployed:

"The butchers were ever so kind. They knew. You know, you could ask for something to cook, fry. And go in for cracked eggs, she'd crack 'em for me."¹⁰⁸

To Leslie Wisdan, amongst others, this mutuality and fellowship appeared as part of the natural way of life. Like Mrs. Lewington he recalled the help people would get during periods of sickness:

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

¹⁰⁵ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 28.5.37., 11.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Mrs. Bunyan.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

“You know the odd occasions people went to hospital, there was almost certainly somebody to take your kids in at dinner time. Next door Mrs. Kreggs, next door to us, did it for me when my mother was in hospital with a hysterectomy, for three, three weeks. She gave me a midday dinner. *But people were like that.*”¹⁰⁹

Similarly, when the family’s sofa caught fire and threatened to burn down the house:

“As soon as there was any ruckus, this man who used to keep the chickens two doors away, he came in, and I don’t know if anybody else came in, but they just lifted the thing up still burning, dragged it through the house and took it outside. *I mean that’s the sort of thing you’d do instantaneously. But, I mean, you were, it was the thing ... if anybody needed help you sort of helped them in my experience.*”¹¹⁰

Watling, therefore, beyond being identified as a community by its residents in terms of their friendliness, gregarious nature and public sociability, was also conceptualized as a community in terms of the residents’ mutual aid ethic, the help and support they gave to and received from one another. As Leslie Wisdan, for instance, put it when I asked him if “the estate could have been called a community?”:

“Oh sure. Well in so far, well I don’t know how sociologists would define a, I mean in the sense that people were certainly prepared to help each other, yes quite definitely. ... if you were in trouble I think you’d never be short of somebody to give you a hand. If that’s how you define it, I’d say yes most definitely.”¹¹¹

Community on Watling then, as the Yeos suggest, was indeed also ‘created from inside’ by the residents themselves.

(ii) Roehampton.

The definition of community in terms of the residents’ informal mutuality was also apparent on Roehampton. Just as the people of Watling emphasised the importance of mutual caring in human relations to their communal sensibilities, so too did the Roehampton tenants. As one resident put it, the people’s

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Mr. Wisdan. My emphasis.

¹¹ Interview with Mr. Wisdan. My emphasis.

¹¹¹ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

neighbourliness and mutual support helped ensure that Roehampton “was a very affable community.”¹¹²

“Oh there was a lot of neighbourliness, and people would help each other. Oh yes, very much so. Yes, there’s no question that there was a lot of help in that fashion.”¹¹³

For instance, as on Watling, “if anybody died some woman would go around to chip in for a wreath.”¹¹⁴ Similarly, if anybody was ill, “you’d put neighbours in to help them.”¹¹⁵ Once again such support - the residents’ “common concern for one another” - was seen as a normal and expected part of everyday life. For instance, as Margaret Newman recalled:

“I mean my mum had to go off to hospital quite a bit. ... And automatically there would always be a neighbour to look after you until your mum came back. And you know that was just the way things happened. I mean I always went to somebody that lived up at 1 Pleasence Road, and that was just the understood thing. It was very much a community. ... there was a great feeling of community amongst the people.”¹¹⁶

Notably, however, in contrast to the Yeos’ indication, this conceptualization of community was not restricted to the more working-class residents of Roehampton. Mr. Parsons, for instance, who stressed the neighbourly nature of the residents had worked in market research. Mrs. Connelly, who recalled that neighbours would be put in to help if someone was ill, had been a civil servant. Norman Barnes, who saw the estate as a ‘very affable community’ in terms of the residents’ mutual support had been educated to H.N.C. level and worked most of his life in the aircraft design industry. And Mrs. Newman, who not only articulated so clearly, but also so obviously appreciated ‘the great feeling of community amongst the people’, had formerly been a teacher.

In contrast to Watling, however, there was also the feeling that this sense of community was not as much as it could be. The Roehampton residents’ communal sensibilities were again more restricted in comparison to those of their counterparts on Watling for although friendly, the residents insisted they were not *too* friendly.

¹¹² Interview with Mr. Barnes.

¹¹³ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Mr. Pearson.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Mrs. Connelly.

“People were friendly, but they just kept themselves to themselves.”¹¹⁷

“People were friendly, but they kept themselves to themselves.”¹¹⁸

“Just neighbourly you were, you talked and all that but you didn’t get that far with them.”¹¹⁹

As Peter Pearson put it, the Roehampton residents were “reserved.” Thus, although there was ‘common concern for one another’ and people would help each other when they needed help, the residents “didn’t go next door, or go in for cups of sugar.”¹²⁰

Audrey Power, for instance, stressed that her mother:

“wouldn’t have *anybody* in, she wouldn’t make anybody a cup of tea. Everything was for the family because that’s all there was. ... We didn’t entertain, there was enough with family and relatives.”¹²¹

As Margaret Newman, who remember still identified the estate as a community in terms of people’s mutuality, explained “it just wasn’t done ... it just wasn’t the custom.”¹²² The custom instead, as Mrs. Power’s comment suggests, was a focusing of attention upon the residents’ own immediate families and relations:

“They seemed to spend more time with their families and with their own friends and relations, not so much outside.”¹²³

Peter Pearson, for instance, recalled that on Sundays the family regularly left Roehampton to visit his grandparents in Holloway or his aunt in Putney. It was, as he explained, “more of a family combine in those days.”¹²⁴

Although informal networks of mutual aid did exist on Roehampton, therefore, and were recognised as an important feature of the residents’ community, such help given to and received from others does appear to have been in competition with concerns centering on the home and the family. In much the same way as Hughes and Hunt note in their study of Wythenshawe, there was “a commitment to

¹¹⁶ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Mrs. Connelly.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Mr. Pearson.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Mrs. D. Slaughter by the author, 11.1.94.

¹²⁰ Interview with Mr. Pearson.

¹²¹ Interview with Mrs. Power.

¹²² Interview with Mrs. Newman.

¹²³ Interview with Miss Murphy.

¹²⁴ Interview with Mr. Pearson.

privacy that was explicitly contrasted with, and [at times] preferred to, the old tighter-knit communities of the inner city.”¹²⁵

“We had very good neighbours, you know we’d help each other out. But it wasn’t like, not like the community spirit that you got in the East End.”¹²⁶

“I don’t think we were ever quite like the East End with the going in and out like that.”¹²⁷

“It was very reserved. It wasn’t like in the East End days.”¹²⁸

This commitment to privacy, Hughes and Hunt attribute to three main features of the cottage council estates. First, pointing to the increased physical distance between neighbours on the new estates in comparison to the densely-packed terraced houses and tenements where people had moved from, they argue that the estates were “built around the concept of privacy.” Each house with its own gate, pathway and garden “cut off each nuclear household from its neighbours.”¹²⁹ The character and layout of the housing thus encouraged a focus upon the family.

Second, Hughes and Hunt suggest that the domestic demands of the new house also encouraged a home-oriented lifestyle, particularly in view of the emphasis placed upon the need for a clean home by the local authorities who built and let the houses. Certainly this was a concern of the L.C.C. Although the Council had, first, paid great attention to the general condition of each prospective tenant’s home, their record for cleanliness and their mode of living and then, second, if there was deemed potential for improvement, placed them among tenants of a ‘better type’, it was still also thought necessary to instruct the tenants in the proper use of their new home with its up-to-date appliances. The L.C.C. wanted to secure “cleanly living” on the part of its tenants.¹³⁰ Indicative of such an attitude, the Central Housing Advisory

¹²⁵ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, ‘A culture transformed’, 88.

¹²⁶ Interview with Miss Murphy.

¹²⁷ Mrs. Snell. Interview with Mrs. M. Snell and Mr. B. Pratt by the author, 31.9.94.

¹²⁸ Interview with Mr. Pearson.

¹²⁹ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, ‘A culture transformed’, 89.

¹³⁰ Report of the Housing Committee, 18.11.30., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1930*, (London, 1931), 749.

Committee reported, for instance, that many families had never cooked with a modern grate, nor been able to take a bath in a bathroom.¹³¹ As such, they would be:

“grateful for a demonstration of the proper use of the grate and copper and how to clean the flues; for advice as to the best methods of keeping the bath, lavatory taps and sink clean, on floor coverings and curtains, on the precautions to be taken to prevent re-infestation with vermin.”¹³²

At one level, such instruction was contained within a Tenants’ Handbook, issued to every L.C.C. tenant. The *Becontree Tenants’ Handbook* of 1933, for instance, offered “advice to tenants” on how to use their toilets:

“Water closets should not be used carelessly; for example, there is no need to pull the chain with a jerk.”¹³³

The *Handbook* also listed the Conditions of Tenancy. The tenants were informed, for instance, that pictures were only to be hung on picture rails provided by the Council or on picture hooks of a pattern supplied or approved by the Council; any washing or “unsightly objects” were only to be exposed to public view in their backgardens; and the windows were to be cleaned at least once every week.¹³⁴ More than this, however, each estate superintendent also visited any house “in which the cleanliness of a tenant” was considered to be doubtful. This enabled the superintendents “to pay special attention to any who do not keep their ... houses in a desirable condition.”¹³⁵ This special attention could culminate in eviction for the tenants concerned if their conditions did not improve. As a result, the tenants, Hughes and Hunt tell us, were “left little time or opportunity for activity outside the home.”¹³⁶

Third, Hughes and Hunt argue that the skilled working-class families on Wythenshawe were keen to distinguish themselves from the unskilled working class. The estate’s early residents, they tell us, saw themselves as the elite of the working

¹³¹ See C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 6-7.

¹³² See C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 34-5.

¹³³ L.C.C., *Becontree Tenants’ Handbook: a handbook of useful information for tenants* (London, 1933), 16.

¹³⁴ See L.C.C., *Becontree Tenants’ Handbook*, 13-15.

¹³⁵ Report of the Housing Committee, 18.11.30.

¹³⁶ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, ‘A culture transformed’, 94.

class who insisted sharply that they were not slum clearance tenants and further distinguished themselves from the “rougher” post-World War II residents. As a means of demonstrating their respectability they chose to actively embrace the very high domestic standards expected of them.¹³⁷ “Domesticity,” they emphasise, “was an essential facet of respectability.”¹³⁸ Again, therefore, there was limited time or opportunity for activity outside the home and thus privacy, “minding your own business, keeping yourself to yourself”, became an “essential element of the Wythenshawe culture of respectability.”¹³⁹

To an extent, Roehampton does provide some support for all of Hughes and Hunt’s arguments. Leslie Parsons, for instance, explained how the layout of the estate did indeed keep people at a distance:

“You see because of the way things are here, there wasn’t a need to walk around because, you see, you could communicate over the garden fence. See our garden fences were only sort of, were only those little pole things, not solid. So you were, there was a natural sort of communication point. ... I mean, I don’t think anybody even thought about just wandering in. There was no need to. It didn’t occur.”¹⁴⁰

Although residents communicated, therefore, they did so from their own private domains. Other residents pointed out also that there was not a great deal of time for socializing, in view of the demands of both paid and domestic work:

“The parents in those days you know were too busy looking after their children and working and things like that, you know. I mean when my father, he had long days at work, by the time he got home ... And the worries of running a family, clothing them and feeding them. And then my mother having four boys you know, washing under those conditions, you didn’t have washing machines in those days, was a full-time job.”¹⁴¹

“It’s not the same kind of neighbourliness that, we weren’t the neighbours that would kind of sit in next door for coffee and that, even in those days, because the mothers were too busy with their children.”¹⁴²

“The women had very, very little social life. ... by the time they’d done all their work, you haven’t got any of the modern aids - light your fire and heat

¹³⁷ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, ‘A culture transformed’, 88.

¹³⁸ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, ‘A culture transformed’, 96.

¹³⁹ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, ‘A culture transformed’, 94.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Mr. Pearson.

¹⁴² Interview with Mrs. Connelly.

your copper to do your washing, put it through the mangle and do all the other things.”¹⁴³

There was also, as the previous chapter has shown, a tendency for the Roehampton residents to identify themselves as the elite of the working class, even as members of the middle class. In their own view, they were at the very least respectable workers in stable and regularly paid employment. The residents of Roehampton, remember, were ‘chosen’, and it was not ‘what you would really call a common cockney estate’. Frequently, they did distinguish themselves from later, ‘rougher’ residents:

“After the War they started to put a totally different type of person in to the houses.”¹⁴⁴

“It was a much better atmosphere, different people here than now there are.”¹⁴⁵

“If you speak of class distinctions here on the estate, I suppose, putting it another way, there were a lot of people who came to live here from very rough areas. ... Not at the very beginning, no this was later. And therefore there was always that, oh you know, ‘they’re not nice people, don’t mix with them’. Or mums would say, you know.”¹⁴⁶

Hughes and Hunt’s explanation of the commitment to privacy on Wythenshawe appears quite plausible for Roehampton, therefore. However, if the layout of the estate, the L.C.C.’s emphasis on domesticity, and the embrace of this by the skilled working-class of the estate was responsible for the Roehampton residents’ rejection of the ‘traditional’ ideal of community in favour of a culture of privacy, much the same should also have been evident on Watling. In fact it should have been more evident.

First, just as Roehampton was constructed along garden city lines with the houses at a low density, separated from those adjacent by a garden and hedge or fence, and each with its own entrance path and gate, so too was Watling. If anything the houses of Watling were more dispersed. As noted in the previous

¹⁴³ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Mr. Pearson.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

chapter, they were built at slightly less than eleven to the acre, compared to almost sixteen per acre on Roehampton.

Second, if the tenants of Roehampton found that their time and opportunities for socializing outside of the house were restricted in view of the demands for domesticity placed upon them by the L.C.C., much the same would have been experienced by their counterparts on Watling. In fact, once again this would have been more acute on Watling for the slum clearance tenants there were paid special attention, in line with the policy of the Institute of Housing, and later the recommendations of the 1938 C.H.A.C. report.¹⁴⁷ When dealing with families rehoused through slum clearance, the L.C.C. employed a special staff of women assistants, who were deemed to be “experienced with dealing with the social problems of the poorer classes.”¹⁴⁸ It was their responsibility to visit families prior to their removal from slum areas into the Council’s accommodation, and then to keep in touch with them for at least six months after rehousing, giving advice and help. They were to report to the estate superintendent upon “the response made by the families to their better environment”, and if they had not “sufficiently responded”, the visits were to continue.¹⁴⁹ Such treatment was in addition to usual visiting by the estate superintendent in connection with general estate management, such as arrears of rent and the need for repairs. Overall, therefore, special attention could be paid to Watling’s tenants, especially of course those “not keeping their dwelling in a desirable condition.”¹⁵⁰ Certainly more so than would have occurred on Roehampton.

Third, just as there were skilled working-class tenants on Roehampton, they were also present on Watling. As the figures of Tables 3.1 and 3.2 suggest, more so in fact. In 1930, for instance, over fifty per cent. of Watling tenants were employed in skilled occupations as compared to approximately thirty-three per cent. on

¹⁴⁷ For details of both see C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 17-8 & 34-5. Report of the Housing and Public Health Committee, 28.3.39., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1939*, (London, 1939), 305-7.

¹⁴⁸ G.H. Gater, *London Housing* (London, 1937), 220.

¹⁴⁹ G.H. Gater, *London Housing*, 220.

¹⁵⁰ Report of the Housing and Public Health Committee, 28.3.39., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1939*, 303-4.

Roehampton.¹⁵¹ Moreover, many were not averse to viewing themselves as respectable. Elizabeth Knight, for instance, insisted that the people who lived on the estate “all seemed a bit rougher” than her. None more so than the “totters” who lived next door:

“The first time I saw her I got the shock of my life. I opened the door to the postman, he’d got a parcel for me, and a little girl stood in front of me ... with the dirtiest nose and dirtiest frock you ever saw in your life. And I thought ‘oh my God!’ And I looked next door, and she stood there with a black frock on, I can see her now, I’ll never forget it, split right down. You could see a pair of pink knickers underneath. And there’s my son in the army, an officer.”¹⁵²

Yet, as I have described above, the residents of Watling soon overcame any feelings they had that their new neighbours were physically distant and separated. Further, they did not retreat into exclusive domesticity either under the burdens of the demands for cleanliness placed upon them by the L.C.C., or their embrace of such demands in order to appear as respectable. Rather they developed a gregarious street life, and, moreover, did go into one another’s houses. As was noted in the previous section, for instance:

“We all used to go into each other’s places.”¹⁵³

“There wasn’t a house along this road that I couldn’t go into and have a cup of tea. And there’s not a house that they wouldn’t come into me. ... Everybody knew everybody, and everybody’s house was open to everybody.”¹⁵⁴

Clearly, therefore, rather than a culture of privacy and commitment to the home being more a part of life on Watling than it was on Roehampton, as Hughes and Hunt’s explanation would suggest, it was in fact not so evident. This tends to suggest, therefore, that there was a further aspect of life on Roehampton responsible for the more inwardly focused nature of the estate’s residents.

This, I suggest, was the greater proportion of middle-class tenants there in comparison to Watling. As was shown in the previous chapter, in 1930, for instance, 36% of Roehampton’s residents were white collar workers, as compared to

¹⁵¹ See Tables 3.1 and 3.2.

¹⁵² Interview with Mrs. Knight.

¹⁵³ Interview with Ms. Haigh.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Mrs. Bunyan.

16% on Watling.¹⁵⁵ There were, in particular, higher proportions of civil servants, clerks and teachers on Roehampton. In the years before 1930 it is likely that such a difference between the estates was even greater, for it would be surprising if not at least some of the most wealthy tenants had left the estate in those years to move into houses in the surrounding suburban areas such as Morden, Epsom and Ewell which were then developing, and been replaced by the L.C.C. by tenants less 'carefully selected' in ideological terms. Either way, more than one in three, at the very least, of the tenants worked in jobs which might afford them at least lower middle class status and, as such, the presence of these tenants would have had an influence throughout the estate.

As the discussion in Chapter One of the values and lifestyles of such middle class tenants suggests, although suburban life and middle-class identities were complex and by no means monolithic, one notable aspect of this influence would have been a commitment to domesticity and privacy. The Roehampton residents' much greater adoption of a culture of privacy as a part of their conceptualization of community appears far more understandable, therefore. Although the skilled working-class residents of both estates may well have sought to distinguish themselves as respectable and distant from the unskilled, the presence of proportionally more middle-class residents on Roehampton, who had already elevated the culture of privacy to the level of a doctrine, encouraged the residents there to demonstrate their respectability in precisely that manner. Example is indeed better than precept.

(iii) Conclusion.

Clearly, therefore, as the Yeos suggest, the conceptualizations of community held by the residents of the cottage council estates were to an extent grounded in their informal networks of mutual support. The residents of both Roehampton and Watling, in addition to identifying, *to varying degrees*, their friendship, gregarious nature and public sociability as important features of their feelings of community, also articulated a sense of community intimately connected to the help and support

¹⁵⁵ Table 3.1.

they received from and offered to their friends and neighbours. Community was to a large extent created from inside, and by the residents themselves.

As the example of Roehampton demonstrates, however, the indication of the Yeos that these conceptualizations were restricted solely to the working class needs to be reassessed. It has been emphasised that Roehampton's residents were in the main either lower middle class or, in later years especially, members of the labour aristocracy, yet mutuality was still an important feature of their community.

At the same time, however, common concern for one another amongst the tenants was not as strong on Roehampton as it was on Watling. The conceptualization of community on Roehampton was more limited than it was on Watling. Just as the Roehampton residents did not see their community as being structured around any gregarious street life, so too they insisted that people did not get 'too' neighbourly. Although still generally identifying the estate as a community, they were not a community 'like the East End'. The people kept themselves to themselves and their neighbours at a distance. The home, the family and privacy were the norm. Although previous work has attributed this to the physical layout and management of the estates, plus the desire of the skilled working class to distinguish themselves as respectable, if this was wholly responsible then such an ethos should also have prevailed on Watling. It did not however, and as such I have argued that the Roehampton residents' conceptualization of community was structured, in part at least, by the middle-class nature of many of the estate's residents and by the commitment to privacy which was representative of the attitudes so often attributed to this group. In comparison to Watling, community on Roehampton was less grounded in the gregarious nature and public sociability of its tenants not simply because the skilled working class rejected this in favour of a more respectable, privatised lifestyle, but because it was also encouraged by the greater number of middle-class residents who were there. What can be seen are different social geographies of community structured around the balance between public and private spaces and grounded in the class compositions of these estates.

D. Communities Of Council Tenants.

In the third section of this chapter, the perception and treatment of Roehampton and Watling by their surrounding areas, and the effects of this on the residents' communal sensibilities, are examined. Clear differences between Watling and Roehampton again arise here, once more reflecting in part the contrasting social structures of each estate.

Many of those who lived around Watling did not view the estate positively. Initially, they had not wanted it to be built. Once it had been its imagined geography, an imagining largely informed by unrepresentative newspaper reporting, was as a problem area both socially and politically. This ensured that, more than simply being disliked, Watling faced fierce antagonism from both the area's established private residents and the councillors at Hendon Town Hall. This, I argue, served to markedly distinguish, if not isolate, Watling in the eyes of its own residents from the surrounding areas and thus reinforced their communal sensibility.

Roehampton, on the other hand, was imagined more positively by its surrounding neighbourhood. It was seen as a model garden suburb. Most especially, its tenants, in view of their higher social status and without the hindrance of unfavourable newspaper reporting, could only be envisaged by the people of West Putney as respectable. Admittedly, the plans to build the estate had been met with opposition, but this soon subsided, and any hostility to the Roehampton tenants never approached that experienced by the residents of Watling. Only slight tensions between the estate residents and the surrounding private residents occasionally surfaced. Although, therefore, a communal sensibility of belonging to the estate rather than any wider area could be evident to the residents, the significance of this to the Roehampton residents' feelings of community was markedly less than on Watling.

(i) Watling: A Little Moscow.

Even before the first brick was laid on Watling feelings against the estate had run very high. In 1924, for instance, when the L.C.C. had first announced its plans

to acquire the land for the estate, the scheme had faced a “storm of opposition.”¹⁵⁶ Opposition had centred on the very serious misgivings of the area’s established residents as to the nature of the housing to be built and, more importantly, the type of people who would be coming to live as their neighbours.¹⁵⁷ This point was made clear, for instance, by Mr. C.W. Hill, J.P., chairman of Hendon Urban District Council, at the Public Enquiry at Hendon Town Hall into the L.C.C.’s proposals.

“His Council had carefully considered the London County Council’s scheme and had come to the conclusion that it would spoil the district. ... Houses built like those proposed ... deteriorated into slums.”¹⁵⁸

As Mrs. Ryall put it:

“The people who lived in Edgware hated this place being built. ... They didn’t know what sort of rough people they were going to get here.”¹⁵⁹

The soon-to-be tenants of Watling were feared as slumdweller who could only turn their new home into a slum. It was thought that they, and their estate, would be a social problem.

This was an imagining that was to persist once building had begun and people were starting to move in. When, for instance, the Mill Hill Literary and Debating Society in 1929 discussed “The Watling Estate and what it means to Mill Hill”, one of the opening comments from C. Patten, a Mill Hill resident, was that “they could not empty London without having emptied some of the dregs of civilisation.”¹⁶⁰ As Kerry Alford who had lived close to Watling recalled, there was the “general feeling” that drunkenness was a problem; “you know Saturday nights were disgusting, the drunkenness they had at the Bald Faced Stag.” There was also the “anecdotal nonsense” that “people kept their coal in the bath.”¹⁶¹

“The people who lived in the more expensive houses just didn’t want to know you. ... The estate had an awful name to start with and it took years

¹⁵⁶ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 19.2.26., 15.

¹⁵⁷ See, for instance, *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 03.1.33., 7.

¹⁵⁸ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 12.12.24., 5.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Mrs. Ryall.

¹⁶⁰ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 8.2.29., 3.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Mr. K. Alford by the author, 21.6.94.

for it to die down. We'd hear people saying, 'Oh yes, you're living on the estate where they put coal in their baths!'.¹⁶²

Undoubtedly a contributor to these views of Watling was the *Hendon Times*, in its various guises. Although one of the paper's journalists felt inclined to say in 1927 that the estate would be a "little gem" when it was completed, such an appreciative attitude did not continue, but was replaced by an eagerness to report any trouble that could be connected to the estate.¹⁶³ In particular, the people living around Watling were informed in no uncertain manner of any disorderly behaviour of their new neighbours through the weekly reports of the proceedings at Hendon Magistrates' Courts. In much the same way as the 'neighbourly' disputes mentioned in Section B were reported, burglaries, muggings, assaults and gangs of hooligans, for instance, were all also frequently recorded, and practically without exception the relevance of the Watling estate to each case was emphasised within the story headline. For instance:

"Purse Snatching Case - Watling Estate Woman before the Hendon Magistrates."¹⁶⁴

"Assault on teacher - Watling Parent causes disturbance at the Hyde school."¹⁶⁵

"Razor slashing at Watling."¹⁶⁶

"A Watling Estate Gang - Young Thieves Ordered to Receive the Birch."¹⁶⁷

"A Watling Riot - Edgware Police Officers Pelted by a Hostile Crowd."¹⁶⁸

"Saturday Night Scene - Watling Man Sent to Prison for Assaulting the Police."¹⁶⁹

The reporting may well have been factual. It was not, however, representative of the activities of the estate's population as a whole. Such behaviour, Ronald Payne assured me, was only attributable to a small percentage of

¹⁶² Recollection of Mrs. Knight, in A. Rubinstein, A. Andrews, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Just Like The Country*, 53.

¹⁶³ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 14.1.27., 9.

¹⁶⁴ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 17.8.28., 7.

¹⁶⁵ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 7.12.28., 9.

¹⁶⁶ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 20.9.29., 9.

¹⁶⁷ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 21.2.30., 8.

¹⁶⁸ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 26.12.30., 7.

¹⁶⁹ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 27.7.34., 6.

residents.¹⁷⁰ This, however, was not apparent from the reporting, and the image presented of the estate was far from positive. As *The Watling Resident* put it, the attitude of the Press was “to be deplored and certainly does not help to improve matters regarding the feeling of our neighbours towards us.”¹⁷¹

Watling, then, was seen as a problem area both before and after it had been populated. Its residents were depicted, and perceived, as “uncivilized beings.”¹⁷² Its imagined geography to the people of Hendon was worse than just this, however. The perceived politics of the estate’s residents served only to further define the estate as a problem area in the eyes of the generally Conservative-voting suburbanites of Hendon. Not only were there many Socialists among the new council tenants moving to the area, but there were Communists too. Conservatives, however, formed only a minority within Watling’s residents. In view of this Watling quickly became notorious for being left wing. More than this, however, it was identified as a ‘Little Moscow’:¹⁷³

“Because of all the people that lived here you see. They said they were Communists and, and they probably were a lot of them, and Socialists. And I mean for Mill Hill and Edgware that wasn’t a Socialist section.”¹⁷⁴

“Well it was called Little Moscow, Burnt Oak you know. ... Yes it was called Little Moscow, more reds then.”¹⁷⁵

“When the buses stopped at the top of the road, the conductor would shout out, you know, ‘anyone for Little Moscow’.”¹⁷⁶

Not merely did the residents surrounding Watling see their new neighbours as ‘uncivilised beings’, therefore, but they were revolutionaries too. Watling was imagined as a miniature version of Moscow, and thus came to be “synonymous with the atrocities of the Bolsheviks: their atheism, their immorality, and most of all, their dictatorial rule over moderate working-men.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Mr. Payne.

¹⁷¹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (11) (March 1929), 270.

¹⁷² *The Watling Resident* 7 (6) (October 1934), 1.

¹⁷³ Interview with Mr. Southwell.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Mrs. Ryall.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Mr. Todd.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Mr. Southwell.

¹⁷⁷ S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, 14.

Watling was certainly a Labour stronghold. Although the Watling and Burnt Oak Group of the Hendon Labour Party, formed in early 1928, did not have a particularly high membership, the success of Labour candidates for seats on the Hendon Urban District, later Borough, Council was still never seriously challenged. In 1936, for instance, the Party membership was only around two hundred and fifty, yet throughout the 1930s Watling was represented solely by Labour councillors, who regularly polled in excess of fifty per cent. of the vote.¹⁷⁸ In the elections of May 1932, for instance, the Party's three candidates (S.E. Sharpe, C. Pinkney, and T. Pugh) collected over eighty per cent. of all the votes cast.¹⁷⁹

The Communist Party was also active on Watling, even before building had been completed. In 1928, for instance, they were already issuing circulars campaigning for lower rents. According to the *Hendon and Finchley Times*, it was the Party's view that although the residents had "escaped from the ugliness and filth of the slums", their struggle to live had "in no way become easier." Rather, their life had become more difficult in view of Watling's high rents, rents that were high because the residents had to "provide interest to L.C.C. bondholders."¹⁸⁰

Another early example of their agitations came later in the same year, when they produced a circular addressed to "The Working-Men and Working-Women of Watling", attacking Hendon's then Urban District Council.

"The Hendon Council is dominated by 'Tory' politicians, who are the defenders of the landlord and the privileged class. ...

The anti-working-class policy of the Hendon Council is clearly indicated by the delay in providing full education facilities for the worker's children, the failure to establish infant and maternity welfare centres, libraries, &c.

...
The Watling group of the Communist Party will carry on the fight against the Hendon dictators, and finally declares that only by the establishment of workers' Councils under the leadership of the Communist Party can the workers gain their political and economic freedom.

The workers will only get what they are strong enough to take."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ R. Durant, *Watling*, 45.

¹⁷⁹ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 4.11.32., 9.

¹⁸⁰ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 15.6.28., 9, 15.

¹⁸¹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 14.12.28., 5.

The Party's local leader, Jack Carson, was a celebrated and notable martyr to the cause. Although almost certainly of a different political persuasion, the Rover, for instance, lauded him in January 1932 for the "hard work and tenacity" with which he pursued his aims.¹⁸² Soon thereafter his status, or perhaps notoriety, was further elevated. First, in December 1932 he was imprisoned for a month when he refused to be bound over at the magistrates' courts after he had assaulted a Relieving Officer.¹⁸³ Then in the following year he was fined £1 for failing to stop for a policeman near Hendon aerodrome, where anti-war graffiti had been appearing.¹⁸⁴ Graffiti that had indeed been painted by the Communists.¹⁸⁵

The Conservative Party, meanwhile, although a social success, was a political failure. Just four years after being built, its club hall in Barnfield Road had to be enlarged in 1932 to cater for the high numbers who wanted to attend its Monday evening men's club, its social evening on Thursdays, and whist drive each Saturday.¹⁸⁶ In the May Council elections of the same year, however, the Party had fielded no candidates.¹⁸⁷ This was in fact a situation that was to recur throughout the 1930s. Again in 1935, for instance, no opposition was offered to the Labour candidate, H.W.J. Connell.¹⁸⁸ As the *Hendon Times and Guardian* commented of the Party, "one cannot accuse it of being a really live political organisation in this district."¹⁸⁹

In contrast to the image of Watling suggested by the label of 'Little Moscow', however, the residents of Watling were not all Communists. Although the Communists' agitations for rent reductions were widely supported, support beyond this was limited. The *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian* reported, for instance:

¹⁸² *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 29.1.32., 7.

¹⁸³ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 23.12.32., 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 4.7.33., 15.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

¹⁸⁶ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 14.10.32., 9.

¹⁸⁷ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 8.4.32., 9.

¹⁸⁸ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 1.11.35., 5.

¹⁸⁹ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 14.10.32., 9.

“Support was sadly lacking for the workers’ rally which had been arranged to take place outside Burnt Oak station ... by the local Communist Party. ... The event proved to be a farce, for only two women and some children arrived.”¹⁹⁰

Moreover, there was never any electoral success. In the Council elections of May 1932, for instance, the Party’s two candidates received less than five per cent. of the vote; Mrs. T.E. Mace getting eighty-five votes and Mr. J.N. Thompson eighty-three votes.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, the imagined geography of Watling as a “Red Spot” deposited in Hendon “by the grace of the London County Council” was widespread.¹⁹² Once again, the *Hendon Times* must be attributed with some responsibility for helping to present and re-present this image of Watling, particularly in the estate’s early years. Just as the newspaper had been ever willing to draw attention to residents’ appearances in the magistrates’ courts, so too it felt the need to inform the people of Hendon of their politics, and implicit within the reporting was a depiction of the residents as both rough and potentially revolutionary.

At one level, this reflected merely the Socialist inclination of many of Watling’s residents; the Conservatives found them a “hard nut to crack.”¹⁹³ Yet, in reporting this there was a frequent emphasis placed, first, on the rowdy nature of the Labour supporters. When Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, Hendon’s Conservative M.P., visited Goldbeaters School in 1929, for instance, it was reported that not only was he greeted by a mixture of “cheering and booing”, but that also:

“At the close of the meeting a voice called for three cheers for Mr. Ramsay MacDonald which were heartily given. Another asked for the same for Mr. Baldwin, but only loud boos were audible. The singing of the Red Flag then followed.”¹⁹⁴

Similarly, Cunliffe-Lister experienced “a mixed reception” when he visited Barnfield School a few years later, for “interruptions were so frequent and his opponents

¹⁹⁰ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 5.5.33., 9.

¹⁹¹ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 8.4.32., 9.

¹⁹² Mr. A.W. Shakespeare, speaking at the annual dinner of the Edgware Unionists. *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 29.3.29., 10.

¹⁹³ Mrs. Ernest Bell at a Colindale and Watling Junior Imperial League Meeting. *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 6.9.29., 8.

¹⁹⁴ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 31.5.29., 8.

caused so much noise that it was only with difficulty that he could be heard at times.”¹⁹⁵

Second, if the *Times* was to be believed, the Socialists could also be violent. In 1929, for instance, Hendon was informed that the police had to intervene in a “fracas” at an open-air Labour meeting in Watling Avenue after some of the crowd had allegedly attacked members of the Colindale and Watling Junior Imperial League.¹⁹⁶ Six years later at the same spot the crowd again became restless. This time, however, they attacked a group of Fascists who were attempting to hold their own weekly, open-air meeting.¹⁹⁷

Moreover, the more extreme, potentially revolutionary, activities of the Communist Party on the estate were also reported. Having “been favoured with a copy” of the circular to the ‘Working-men and Working-women of Watling’, for instance, the newspaper printed it in full, for it would “no doubt interest a much wider circle.”¹⁹⁸ Rather than just reporting, the newspaper also expressed its own opinions of the estate. Of the Communist campaigns for lower rents, for instance, it was opined that the Party, and its “wild statements”, was “trying hard to ferment trouble and create a class war.”¹⁹⁹ Writing on the local elections of Spring 1929, for instance, it was similarly commented that:

“... particular attention must be given to the Watling area. Many have described this new estate as a veritable hotbed of Socialists, with many extremist [*sic*] among their number, and from communications that reach this office from time to time there seems justification for applying that description.”²⁰⁰

These were views that could only darken the image of Watling in the eyes of its neighbours, the mainly Conservative voters of Hendon.

Admittedly, the newspaper’s tone was not always so damning, particularly in later years. Just as Jack Carson was praised for his hard work and tenacity, there

¹⁹⁵ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 23.10.31., 13.

¹⁹⁶ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 31.5.29., 9.

¹⁹⁷ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 30.8.35., 5.

¹⁹⁸ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 14.12.28., 5.

¹⁹⁹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 15.6.28., 15.

²⁰⁰ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 8.3.29., 8.

were other occasions too on which a more balanced sense of reporting was evident.²⁰¹ If anything, the newspaper at times seemed to be attempting to correct the misrepresentation of Watling as a Little Moscow. In 1931, for instance, *The Rover* urged the Colindale and Watling Unionist Association to get in touch with more residents, for they were “not so ‘red’ as many outsiders imagine.”²⁰² A few months later, he further noted that although “many people living at a distance are apt to think, through ignorance and the medium of cheap gossip, that Watling residents are revolutionary in political thought,” they were however “quite immune ... from revolutionary ideas.”²⁰³

The damage, however, had already been done. As *The Watling Resident* lamented in August 1932, “the red bogey still prevails, and our Estate is still likened to Moscow by those most ignorant of the place.”²⁰⁴ When the Hendon Constitutional Club was opened in February 1934, for instance, Sir Hugh Davidson speaking on the possibility of the Underground extending beyond Edgware noted that “we cannot say what kind of people might settle down there, and if they were the same as them lower down [in Watling], it might be difficult.”²⁰⁵ Watling was not to rid itself of its Communist image until after World War II.²⁰⁶

Viewed as a problem area in both social and political terms, with ‘uncivilised’ and ‘revolutionary’ tenants, Watling and its residents were quite unsurprisingly disliked by many of the people who lived nearby:

“Mill Hill was a really, sort of called it toffee-nosed you know. ... I don’t think they liked the council estate, they all looked down on you.”²⁰⁷

“I know they didn’t like Watling people very much. ... I was talking to a girl that came from Mill Hill I think it was. And she said, happened to say, ‘Where do you live?’, and I said, ‘Watling’. And she sort of turned her nose

²⁰¹ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 29.1.32., 7.

²⁰² *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 17.4.31., 7.

²⁰³ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 11.12.31., 7.

²⁰⁴ *The Watling Resident* 5 (4) (August 1932), 19.

²⁰⁵ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 23.2.34. Quoted in A.A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*, 305.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Mr. Southwell.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Mr. Todd.

up and said, 'Oh, Watling'. I don't suppose she'd ever set foot in the place."²⁰⁸

As *The Watling Resident* expressed it, the estate was an "eyesore in the County of Middlesex", a "bugbear" to its "sophisticated neighbours."²⁰⁹

More than just being disliked, however, the residents of Watling also experienced open hostility and fierce, and often petty, antagonism from the nearby districts, especially Mill Hill. The most notable example of this, attracting the attention of the national press, was a letter sent to the *Hendon and Finchley Times* in late 1927 from a resident of Mill Hill, who chose to be known only as 'Adsum'.²¹⁰ Drawing first on the more negative political images of Watling's tenants, he berated the fall in his district's residential value due to the growth of the "raw, red tentacles of that housing octopus, the London County Council Watling Estate." His attention then switched to the social attributes, as he saw them, of his new neighbours:

"House owners find that they are having to move, but nobody wants a house in the district now with hordes of ex-slumdweller on the doorstep, and the threat of a greyhound track to add liveliness. Already there is a need for more police protection. People in Mill Hill have found their gardens ruined by children pulling up rose standards and stripping fruit trees. The Watlingites are ex-residents of Somers Town, and other painful districts. The language of some of them is such that even a workman on the estate told me last week that he blushed 'to think that such a female could use such a mouthful'."

As a fitting climax he predicted that Mill Hill would "become like the rest of the L.C.C. estate districts, as for instance, the flea-bitten Ilford area."²¹¹

It was in fact suggested that in view of the anonymity of 'Adsum', the newspaper had itself devised the letter for publicity reasons. This, however, was a charge that was emphatically denied.²¹² On the contrary, it was argued, 'Adsum' was only "voicing the views of many of his neighbours."²¹³ This was an argument that had some substance, for although the extremism of 'Adsum's' invective was

²⁰⁸ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

²⁰⁹ *The Watling Resident* 6 (10) (February 1934), 5.

²¹⁰ See, for instance, *Daily Herald*, 29.11.27., 7.

²¹¹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 11.11.27., 12.

²¹² *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 25.11.27., 8.

²¹³ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 18.11.27., 8.

rebuked by many subsequent writers on the subject, the same writers, from the districts surrounding Watling, still often reiterated his main complaints against the estate. For instance:

“I will agree that there are some foul-mouthed women and also some young thieves, too, from my own experience of having money snatched from my children’s hands.”²¹⁴

And from Councillor F.C. Rice:

“It is true that there are certain undesirable characters on the Watling Estate, as evidenced by the petty pilferings of fruit, milk, etc., from the adjoining houses.”²¹⁵

Then, less than two years later, similar antagonism was again demonstrated when the residents of Lyndhurst Avenue, Mill Hill, forwarded a petition to the local Council, local police, the headmasters of local schools and to Scotland Yard in protest against the estate residents’ deviant behaviour. The heinous crime, it was discovered, was that flowers had once again disappeared from some gardens.²¹⁶

To the estate clerk, Mr. Payne, this attitude of the surrounding residents was one of resentment:

“There was some resentment, there’s no doubt about that. Anything that went wrong, they blamed us for it, oh yes, the Watling estate.”²¹⁷

The actual tenants of Watling, however, could interpret the antagonism in rather stronger terms.

“We were really the lowest of the low.”²¹⁸

“You were the scum of the Earth.”²¹⁹

Hostility to Watling, however, did not come solely from the private residents of Hendon, but was manifest elsewhere too. When the Watling children had to attend schools in Hendon because the estate schools were unfinished, for instance,

²¹⁴ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 18.11.27., 14.

²¹⁵ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 25.11.27., 13.

²¹⁶ *The Watling Resident* 2 (3) (July 1929), 12.

²¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Payne.

²¹⁸ Mrs. Goodman. Interview with Mr. & Mrs. Goodman.

²¹⁹ Mr. Symmond. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

they were segregated from the rest of the children.²²⁰ The teachers there were also unwilling to give them extra lessons.²²¹

Moreover, it was also evident at the Town Hall. First, in view of the estate's politics there was a concerted, although eventually unsuccessful, effort to deny Watling representation on the Council. In 1928, for instance, despite a seventy-strong deputation from Watling, led by Messrs. McKay, Pearson, Pugh and Warren, the Conservative-dominated Council wanted to split the estate into separate parts which would then be absorbed into existing wards, so decreasing the Labour vote. Councillor Colonel Hearn attempted to justify this in that the:

“Watling Estate was not an entity, and he did not think the people wanted to be. They could not have any part of the district setting itself up as an entity in these days.”²²²

Then, once representation had been granted and the ward of Burnt Oak formed, similar anti-Watling sentiment still came to the fore. In 1932, for instance, after health visitors had been visiting some of the estate's residents, the Public Health Committee recommended that the L.C.C. be informed that, despite Watling having been built to relieve overcrowding, tenants were taking in foster children and lodgers for reward. Yet, this was occurring at no greater a rate than elsewhere in Hendon. As one of the Watling members, Councillor Pugh, responded:

“There is a definite feeling against Watling on the part of some members of this Council, but I hope the members will try to shake off that anti-Watling complex which they seem to have developed.”²²³

With its imagined geography as it was, therefore, anti-Watling sentiments were clearly widespread, with the residents repeatedly subjected to criticism and antagonism from without. As a resident of Watling, Mr. W. Turner, put it the people of the estate were experiencing “bad feeling and a certain amount of class hatred.”²²⁴ Inevitably, a result of this was that the tenants of Watling frequently did not come to identify themselves as a part of Hendon, for it was evident to them that

²²⁰ *The Watling Resident* 2 (3) (July 1929), 12; & 4 (9) (January 1932), 9.

²²¹ Mr. Barker. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

²²² *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 30.11.28., 8, 12-3.

²²³ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 24.6.32., 11.

²²⁴ Letter to the Editor, *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 30.8.29., 7.

they were not welcome there. As Mr. Barker put it, being “reds and rebels and roughs” from Little Moscow, “we were sort of outcasts.”²²⁵

As outcasts, therefore, the tenants’ residence in Watling, of which they were continually reminded, reinforced their communal sensibilities. The hostility served to enhance the residents’ feeling of a common identity stemming from their co-residence of Watling. Despite Councillor Hearn’s claim to the contrary, the people of Watling could see themselves and their estate as an entity:

“I say Burnt Oak was Burnt Oak. Mill Hill was a different, a separate entity, as Edgware was.”²²⁶

The residents viewed themselves as distinct from their surrounding areas, and in this sense they identified the Watling estate and their neighbours thereon as a separate community. According to Leslie Pym, for instance, a former resident of Watling and former Mayor of Hendon, the antagonism “helped possibly a greater knit community.”²²⁷ Disliked, criticised and antagonised against, the people of Watling saw themselves as belonging to Watling, rather than to any of the other parts of Hendon. The Watling estate was their community:

“We did come across Mill Hill and Edgware ones, but no, we were a different community. ‘They’re Watling, they’re council house people’.”²²⁸

(ii) Roehampton: A Model Cottage Estate.

Whilst the residents of Watling identified themselves as being part of a community in that their estate was distinct from its surrounding areas, for the residents of Roehampton the feeling of separateness was notably less. As with Watling, the L.C.C. plans for Roehampton had certainly not been initially welcomed by the established residents of West Putney. Yet in contrast to the events in Hendon, the opposition to the Roehampton estate soon subsided once building had begun and people began to settle there. With the help of a more favourable local press, Roehampton’s imagined geography was far more positive than that of Watling for it was viewed as a model garden suburb whose tenants, importantly, were hand-

²²⁵ Mr. Barker. Interview with Mr. Barker and Mr. Symmond.

²²⁶ Interview with Mrs. Bunyan.

²²⁷ Postal questionnaire interview with Mr. L. Pym by the author, 15.6.94.

²²⁸ Mrs. Goodman. Interview with Mr. & Mrs. Goodman.

picked and respectable. Hostility to Roehampton, therefore, was rare, if not non-existent. Admittedly, instances did arise to remind the tenants of their commonality as council tenants. St. Margaret's church especially, whose parishioners came not just from Roehampton, but also from the private residential area to the east of the estate, was the scene of some tension. As such the residents' communal sensibility of being a part of an L.C.C. estate as opposed to an average resident of suburbia was again occasionally apparent. In comparison to Watling, however, it was far less important.

In many respects, the reception afforded in April 1919 by the people of West Putney to the news that the L.C.C. had approved the purchase of the Dover House Estate for the development of housing under the Addison Act was remarkably similar to that of their Hendon counterparts. Although Chairman Walker of the late L.C.C. Housing Committee was "thrilled" at the prospect of five thousand council tenants living in the area, and was supported in this by the Putney, Southfields and Roehampton Labour Party and also the Wandsworth Labour Party and Trades Council, the Wandsworth Borough Council and many established residents did not agree.²²⁹ Rather, as the headline of the *Wandsworth Borough News* made clear, the scheme was envisaged as "A Putney Bombshell," to which there would be "Organised Opposition."²³⁰

As with Watling, the opposition was centred around people's fears as to the type of housing that would be built, the nature of the tenants that would be deposited by the L.C.C. within their midst, and also the effects on neighbouring property values. When the decision was announced to the Borough Council, for instance, Councillor Lieutenant Commander Cooper Rawson called for alternative sites to be considered, describing the one chosen as "absolutely unsuitable for working-class dwellings."²³¹ Alderman Mathias, who was reported as saying he would not allow the implementation of the Addison Act in Wandsworth, elaborated further on the Council's objection to the "wild cat scheme":

²²⁹ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 23.4.19., 4; and 2.5.19., 11. Minutes of L.C.C. Housing Committee and Sub-committees, April 1919. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7276.

²³⁰ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 23.4.19., 4.

²³¹ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 23.4.19., 4.

“The estate was an unique one, villas were wanted badly, and that estate would be unique for the building of villas. ... On one side of Putney Park Lane they would have Gifford House and Granard: on the other side these [council] dwellings.”²³²

According to a columnist of the *Borough News*, the problem lay in the “alarming possibilities the term ‘housing the working classes’” conveyed:

“I think of those dwellings, tenements, and inadequate houses which one associates with crowded areas, and tremble at the prospect of the charms of this particular neighbourhood being sacrificed to them.”²³³

As Peggy Sturman, a resident of West Putney, recalled somewhat more bluntly, there were further fears that the planned estate:

“would get a run down appearance and that perhaps the tenants in it wouldn’t look after it, you know properly. I suppose we looked upon them as all being very, very poor people from the bad areas of the East End and that sort of thing.”²³⁴

To preserve the charms of the neighbourhood, therefore, a protest meeting of residents to discuss the “hasty and ill-advised scheme” was quickly arranged.²³⁵

With the attendance and sympathy of the area’s Conservative M.P., Samuel Samuel, a defence fund was established and a protest committee formed, with Messrs. G. Elkington and A. Paglin of Putney as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively.²³⁶ Amid suggestions that the residents of Putney, Roehampton, and Barnes should buy the Dover House estate to save it, the committee together with the Putney Municipal Alliance proceeded to raise a petition calling for a public enquiry into the L.C.C.’s proposals.²³⁷

By July 1919, however, the calls for a public enquiry had been rejected, and thereafter attitudes to the planned estate began to soften.²³⁸ One aspect of this was that rather than building overcrowded tenement blocks in Roehampton, as the people of West Putney feared, the L.C.C., as I have noted in the previous chapter, actually

²³² *Wandsworth Borough News*, 23.4.19., 4.; and 16.5.19., 9.

²³³ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 23.4.19., 6.

²³⁴ Interview with Mrs. P. Sturman by the author, 7.12.93.

²³⁵ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 23.4.19., 4.

²³⁶ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 2.5.19., 2-3.

²³⁷ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 9.5.19., 8-9. Minutes of L.C.C. Housing Committee and Sub-committees, May 1919. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7276.

²³⁸ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 1.8.19., 2.

developed an estate that came to be widely recognised as one of the most attractive and architecturally pleasing of its genre. The early portion of the estate especially, it should be remembered, did not appear to at least one resident, for instance, as having a “council effect.”²³⁹ As such, even as early as December 1919, when the L.C.C. released further details of the scheme for developing Roehampton, the protest committee having accepted the inevitability of the estate being built responded reasonably favourably.²⁴⁰

It was true that, as had been forecast at the protest meetings, property values in the areas adjacent to the estate did fall, allowing the *Borough Times* to print a very self-satisfied ‘we told you so’.²⁴¹ Yet in the view of G. Elkington, the protest committee chairman, this was more likely due to the sharp practices of estate agents than to the aesthetic qualities of the developing estate. Although still regarding the Estate as a costly mistake, he was:

“bound to say that the modified lay out, the design and grouping of the houses, and the arrangements made for the preservation of the natural amenities of Putney Park Lane and other portions, materially lessen the principal elements of depreciation.”²⁴²

Peggy Sturman’s recollection was more generous still:

“We used to walk around there, and it was a really, really quite a sight. Everybody seemed to take a tremendous pride in the estate.”²⁴³

A second aspect of Putney’s re-appraisal of Roehampton reflected the nature of the tenants the L.C.C. chose to allocate houses on the estate to. As previously explained, the estate’s initial tenants were a carefully selected group from both an economic and ideological standpoint; they had to pay rents that were relatively high, plus they had to be viewed by the L.C.C. as desirable. Mainly they were either middle class or members of the labour aristocracy. An indication that the residents of West Putney were at least content with the virtues of the first of their new neighbours came in 1922. With the publication of revised plans for the second section of the estate, in which the houses would be smaller and simpler, Mr.

²³⁹ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

²⁴⁰ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 24.12.19., 9.

²⁴¹ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 29.4.21., 6-7 & 11.

²⁴² *Wandsworth Borough News*, 6.5.21., 9.

Elkington felt inclined to write to the L.C.C. complaining not of the present standard of tenants, but rather that the new housing “would lower generally the class of tenant.”²⁴⁴

Again, however, such fears were not realised. As has been explained in Chapter Three, the L.C.C. continued, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, to select its tenants for Roehampton very carefully because not only did the rents remain relatively high, but they also wanted to maintain its image as their prize estate. The residents chosen for Roehampton, therefore, tended at the least to have regular and stable jobs that were relatively well-paid. In later years, the tenants were often transport, postal or police workers, so earning the estate the tag of Uniform Town. As Peggy Sturman put it, echoing the views already recorded of the tenants themselves, the residents of Roehampton were envisaged as “hand-picked really, they were responsible people.”²⁴⁵

That such views of Roehampton were held by the people of Putney was undoubtedly helped by the more favourable reporting, in comparison to Watling, that the estate received in the local newspaper, the *Wandsworth Borough News*. Initially, the *Borough News* did not appear to welcome the plans for the estate. In May of 1919, for instance, it ‘reported’ a fictional conversation of Putney residents outlining ‘reasons’ why the L.C.C. should not build the estate there.²⁴⁶ The following year, Councillor Blizzard (Labour) of the Borough Council was to openly accuse the *Borough News* of being especially biased about Roehampton.²⁴⁷ Yet after the initial uproar following the announcement of the plans for the estate and the subsequent activities of the protest committee of Putney residents, Roehampton and its residents rarely appeared to merit comment. If Roehampton residents were summoned to the local magistrates, it was not recorded. Nor were any rowdy meetings of the estate’s Labour Party. Further there was no Communist Party there

²⁴³ Interview with Mrs. Sturman.

²⁴⁴ Letter from G. Elkington to J. Bird (L.C.C. Clerk), 25.7.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN 7467. Letter from G. Elkington & A. Paglin to J. Bird, 9.8.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN 7467.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Mrs. Sturman.

²⁴⁶ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 9.5.19., 9.

²⁴⁷ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 9.4.20., 4.

to be reported as attempting to ferment a class war. The imagining of Roehampton, therefore, by those outside of it was not informed by unfavourable reporting. The image of the estate was not blackened in the popular mind.

The imagined geography of the Roehampton estate was in stark contrast to that of Watling. Uniform Town was far removed from Little Moscow. Whereas Watling was viewed as populated by uncivilised revolutionaries, the people of Uniform Town were imagined as respectable transport workers, postal workers, policemen and the like. Roehampton, it was agreed, was a model cottage estate with decent model citizens as its tenants. The fears of West Putney, voiced so clearly by Peggy Sturman were not realised, for the estate had “always been as it is now, a model cottage estate.”²⁴⁸ Hostility to the estate was therefore rare:

“I would say that the people living in the very large houses beyond Putney Park Lane and possibly down on to the Upper Richmond Road would not have been very upset with the people that came to live here.”²⁴⁹

The naming of Roehampton as Uniform Town by those living around it may well have caused them some amusement and perhaps have been intended as an insult. As a term of abuse, however, it paled into insignificance in comparison with that of Little Moscow. The level of antagonism which the Watling residents had to endure was simply not present around Roehampton:

“They got to like us. The people got to like the people on the estate.”²⁵⁰

Indicative of the amicable relations between the estate and its surrounding area, Norman Barnes, for instance, insisted that there was “nil reaction” from the people of the “very posh places” surrounding the estate. There was “no resentment at all from that point of view.”²⁵¹ Mrs Connelly similarly remembered that, “we were all very friendly.”²⁵² And Mr. Parsons went on to illustrate the lack of hostility he had encountered when he recalled a tennis club just outside of the estate that he had joined:

²⁴⁸ Interview with Mrs. Sturman.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

²⁵⁰ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

²⁵¹ Interview with Mr. Barnes.

²⁵² Interview with Mrs. Connelly.

“There was no class distinction. And a lot of those people were, I know they were from the consulates and the embassies and all sorts, you know all kinds of people there, all kinds of business people. No worry about the people coming from here to play there as members.”²⁵³

It would be wrong to say, however, that the residents of Roehampton were not occasionally made aware of the fact that they lived on a council estate. Somewhat ironically, possibly the sole scene of tension between the estate residents and their house-owning neighbours was St. Margaret’s church. Pre-dating the estate, the church’s original parishioners came from the private housing to the east of Putney Park Lane. They did not welcome their fellow christians who happened also to be L.C.C. tenants. Margaret Newman, for instance, recalled the separate services that were held for the estate tenants and their more wealthy neighbours:

“There was a total division within the parish, you either came from the estate or you came from the *big* houses, and quite honestly we weren’t very welcome if you came from the estate.”²⁵⁴

Even the vicar, Percy Wallace, had little time for his new flock on the estate, preferring his curate to do the work there.²⁵⁵ For the churchgoers, therefore, there was a “feeling that you belonged to the estate.”²⁵⁶ Or, as Mollie Snell put it, “I always thought it was them and us.”²⁵⁷

Still, however, although conscious of being residents of an L.C.C. estate, the people of Roehampton were not imagined as ‘the lowest of the low’. They did not consider themselves as ‘outsiders’. In comparison to Watling, therefore, it can be seen that in this respect the residents’ communal sensibility was not as apparent. Their feelings of belonging to a community that was spatially delimited by the boundaries of the estate, were far less sensitised.

²⁵³ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

²⁵⁵ Mr. Pratt. Interview with Mrs. M. Snell and Mr. B. Pratt by the author, 31.1.94. Also interview with Mr. Barnes.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

²⁵⁷ Mrs. Snell. Interview with Mrs. Snell and Mr. Pratt.

(iii) Conclusion.

The residents of Roehampton and Watling were viewed and treated differently by their near neighbours, with correspondingly different effects on their conceptualizations of community. The imagining of Watling was clearly not favourable in either political or social terms. The tenants of Little Moscow were seen as revolutionaries and as the 'dregs of London'. This was particularly the case in view of the bad press the estate attracted. One result of this imagined geography was that Watling was disliked by the people of Hendon. Often, however, the dislike became manifest more as hostility. Facing hostility from both the residents and Council of Hendon, therefore, the people of Watling saw themselves as different. As residents of Watling, they were 'outcasts'. In this way then, their feelings of belonging to a community became more firmly focused upon their estate than on the other areas of suburbia which surrounded them.

On Roehampton, however, there was a relatively marked absence of antagonism and hostility from the estate's surrounding residents. In part, this can be attributed to the fine architectural design of the estate. The fears of West Putney that the area's charms were to be sacrificed to overcrowded tenement blocks were not realised. More importantly, however, with the absence of any sustained and misleading reporting from the *Wandsworth Borough News*, the Roehampton estate and its inhabitants were presented to those outside in neither a misrepresentative nor unfavourable light. Whilst in no way suggesting that the imagined geography of Watling as a Little Moscow populated by uncivilised revolutionaries was representative, the typically higher social status of Roehampton's residents ensured that it would be extremely difficult to imagine them as anything other than respectable citizens. Many of Roehampton's residents were civil servants, some had their own domestic servants, large numbers were at least lower middle class. Architecturally attractive, populated largely by either the middle class or the labour aristocracy, and not presented in a bad light by the local press, Roehampton incurred little if any antagonism from its surrounding area. Although it would be untrue to say that feelings of 'them' and 'us' did not exist, the importance the Roehampton

residents attributed to this as a part of their communal sensibility, their common identity, was markedly less than in comparison to Watling.

E. Patriarchal Communities.

In the previous three sections I have attempted to show that the generalisation that the inter-war cottage council estates were lacking in community is extremely problematic. The residents of both Roehampton and Watling were able to argue that rather than lacking in community, their estates could be conceptualized as communities in various ways. The intention of this section is to emphasise the danger of nostalgia in viewing the estates as such. Although Roehampton and Watling were identified as communities, they were not necessarily glowing examples of a form of life which it is desirable to emulate. As I have already pointed out, for instance, community could have a racist tone to it. People were not always the best of friends either, at times they could fight amongst themselves. More than this, however, I want to stress that the residents' everyday lives, and the communities of which they were a part, also had a highly patriarchal nature. First, although evidence is sketchy, domestic violence did occur on both estates. Second, and more readily apparent, there was also a clear sexual division of both labour and space. This second aspect of the patriarchal nature of local social relations was also, I suggest, an inherent feature of the residents' conceptualizations of community. Community, therefore, rather than representing an egalitarian social ideal, did in fact constitute a distinctly unequal power relationship between the sexes.

An unavoidable feature of life on Roehampton and Watling was that, behind the notions invoked by the ideal of community of a warm, supportive and egalitarian set of social relations, the presence of domestic violence on the estates was indicative of the patriarchal nature of local social relations that existed. Not surprisingly details about this aspect of people's private lives were rarely volunteered, but there were indications that it did occur. On Roehampton, for instance, the L.C.C.'s attention was drawn to the behaviour of a male resident of Huntingfield Road, who was proving "a source of annoyance to surrounding residents by reason of frequent

violent domestic quarrels.”²⁵⁸ On Watling, excessive male drinking in particular appeared as a contributory factor in such ‘quarrels’. In 1929, for instance, a man from the estate appeared at Hendon Magistrates charged with persistent cruelty to his wife, after, according to the *Hendon and Finchley Times*, she had been struck with a gramophone horn, and threatened with knives and a chair. “He frequently got drunk,” it was reported, “and was continually beating her.”²⁵⁹ Similarly, Mr. Todd recalled a neighbour at the end of the close:

“You see he was always getting drunk. ... And you could hear them, you could hear them rowing.”²⁶⁰

For Mr. Wisdan, who was perhaps the most forthcoming resident that I spoke to, this was “a common enough picture on the estate.” Of his father, he recalled:

“most of the time he was placid enough except when the beer got into him.” Thus, although his father was “a decent man”, there was still “the usual domestic strife that was common enough in Watling.”²⁶¹

Such sexual oppression, although less brutal, was further demonstrated on the estates by the division of both labour and space between the sexes. Unwaged domestic labour in the private realm of the home was very much the women’s responsibility. In Mrs. Newman’s family, for instance, it was her mother who had to do the family’s washing without “any of the modern aids”, which thus involved amongst other things lighting a fire, heating the copper, and afterwards using the mangle.²⁶² As Mr. Pearson put it, this was a “full-time job” for his mother.²⁶³ Cooking was also a woman’s responsibility. Ivy Woollett, for instance, recalled that the only time her father ever did this was when her mother was in bed after the birth of her fourth child. He made some pastry:

²⁵⁸ Report of Valuer to Housing Committee, 21.11.23. Minutes of L.C.C. Housing Committee and Sub-committees, November 1923. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7472.

²⁵⁹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 16.8.29., 7. Reported under the headline “Watling Family’s Unhappy Life.”

²⁶⁰ Interview with Mr. Todd.

²⁶¹ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

²⁶² Interview with Mrs. Newman.

²⁶³ Interview with Mr. Pearson.

“But he only did it because my mum was in bed with the baby. ... That wasn’t his job once mum was well and back on her feet.”²⁶⁴

Conversely, the public realm of paid work was a male domain. It was exceptional for the first generation of women tenants of both Watling and Roehampton to participate in the male world of paid employment. Admittedly, the original tenants’ daughters frequently had full-time jobs of varying descriptions. This, however, was less common for the original ‘homemakers’ on the estate, who typically were confined to the private domain of home, family, and domesticity:

“My mother never went to work of course. Women didn’t in those days.”²⁶⁵

“Mother never ever went to work. Mothers didn’t in those days.”²⁶⁶

Among the residents that I spoke to, only three of the first generation of women had worked, and they did not have access to full-time employment. Dorothy Slaughter, for instance, worked part-time in Steeper’s artificial limb fitting centre on Roehampton Lane.²⁶⁷ Perhaps worse than this, the part-time work for the other two was only a (badly) paid version of the isolated, monotonous and unwaged domestic tasks they normally performed. Leslie Wisdan’s mother first worked at home taking in laundry from the surrounding districts, before later getting a job as an early morning cleaner at the nearby De Havilland aircraft factory in Stag Lane.²⁶⁸ A very early morning job in fact, seeing as she had to leave the house at half past five. Elizabeth Knight meanwhile did housework in the mornings.²⁶⁹

What is even more damning though is that Leslie Wisdan’s mother was toiling so hard solely to make up the shortfall in money that her husband spent on drink:

“He was reasonably well paid, but he had a brewery to keep you know, and money was always short simply because he boozed a lot of it, that be the truth of it. ... it wasn’t right really, there wasn’t enough money to go round.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁴ Recollection of Mrs. Woollett, in P.R.O.P., *We Survived*, 17-8.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Mrs. Power.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Miss Connelly.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Mrs. Slaughter.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

²⁶⁹ Interview with Mrs. Knight.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

Somewhat similarly, Mrs. Knight was working in order to buy a new doormat and copper, something that could not be accomplished otherwise in view of her husband's bad gambling. And she was having to combine this with work in the home:

"I took on housework, so that I was home by the time the children came home. And I only took it on for mornings - then my husband did the shift work. I used to race home on my bike to be there by 12 o'clock to get his dinners before he went to work."²⁷¹

Thus, although the two women had entered the male-dominated domain of paid work, they had done this solely to subsidise their husbands and they still remained responsible for the household's domestic tasks. The social arrangements and responsibilities were clearly not equal.

This, in fact, was also the case within the residents' conceptualizations of community. The informal networks of mutual support so lauded by the residents of both Roehampton and Watling undoubtedly revolved to a large extent around the women residents of the estates. When somebody in Mr. Pearson's street on Roehampton died, for instance, "some woman would go around to chip in for a wreath."²⁷² For Mr. Wisdan on Watling, it was "Mrs. Gutteridge who used to do it mostly." Undoubtedly, this was advantageous to the women in some respects. Savage, for instance, suggests that in the absence of female solidarity stemming from the workplace and institutional life, such networks could enable women to develop forms of "solidarity based on home and neighbourhood."²⁷³ Hughes and Hunt similarly note that the networks can be seen as "empowering".²⁷⁴ The help and support exchanged between residents was:

"an essentially female world where women provided practical and moral support for each other, and where men had little direct impact."²⁷⁵

At the same time, however, just as these female networks were, in addition to being mutually supportive, empowering and a form of female solidarity, they were also

²⁷¹ Interview with Mrs. Knight.

²⁷² Interview with Mr. Pearson.

²⁷³ M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*, 52.

²⁷⁴ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, 'A culture transformed', 91. See also E. Ross, 'Women's neighbourhood sharing in London before World War I', *History Workshop Journal*, XV (1983), 4-27.

clearly based upon female sacrifice. Sacrifice and toil that should not be legitimated despite the warmth with which it, in connection to notions of community, was recalled.

If anything, the residents' conceptualizations of community can also be deemed patriarchal in that they appeared to support the sexual division of labour and space that existed on the estates. The help given to neighbours at times of illness, for instance, was, as I have described, a repeated theme of the residents' mutuality and conceptualizations of community. Yet this community, this mutuality rested upon the premise that cooking was certainly not a male responsibility. If the woman of the house could not cook because of illness, it was not her husband who prepared food for the family, but the neighbours, most probably the female neighbours. When Mr. Wisdan's mother was in hospital for three weeks, it was Mrs. Kreggs from next door who gave him midday dinner.²⁷⁶ When Mrs. Lewington was ill, her husband was fed by the woman one side, and her eldest boy by the woman the other side.²⁷⁷ Similarly, on Roehampton, when Margaret Murphy's mother was ill, "there were people who brought soup and stuff already cooked."²⁷⁸ In this way then, the ideal of community to an extent sustained the sexual division of labour. The support and help from the female neighbours ensured that the men did not have to undertake more domestic duties than was necessary. The male domination of the public realm of paid work was not threatened by a need to be working in the home instead. The unequal power relations between men and women which prevailed throughout the estates, therefore, were perhaps justified to the residents by their imagining of them as a feature of their community, as a feature of their 'morally valued way of life'.

²⁷⁵ A. Hughes & K. Hunt, 'A culture transformed', 89-90.

²⁷⁶ Interview with Mr. Wisdan.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Miss Murphy.

F. Conclusion.

In contrast to the opinions of conventional sociology, therefore, the inter-war cottage council estates of Roehampton and Watling were not 'housing deserts devoid of oases of community'. Not from the viewpoint of the majority of the residents who lived on the two estates anyway. Watling was imagined as a community by its residents in terms of, most notably, their gregariousness, public sociability and their mutuality. Moreover, the residents' feelings of belonging to this community were sensitised by the antagonism they faced from those who surrounded the estate. Roehampton was imagined by its residents as a community too. Their conceptualization of community was grounded in the residents' feelings of friendship that stemmed from the shops and school on the estate that they all shared. Mutuality was also an important feature, despite the large numbers of middle-class tenants there. In contrast to Watling, however, the residents of Roehampton attributed no importance to public sociability and gregariousness within their conceptualization of community. Conversely in fact, although they still envisaged the estate as a community, it was stressed that the people of the estate led a very reserved life, with a focus upon the home, the family, and privacy. Further, in the absence of any real antagonism from the surrounding districts, the residents' sense of belonging to the community of Roehampton was never greatly sensitised, certainly not in comparison to Watling.

Although these conceptualizations of community were not sociographic fact, they were undoubtedly grounded in the specific social-historical and geographical circumstances that the residents of each estate found themselves in.²⁷⁹ To an extent these circumstances, the estates' local social relations, were similar. First, and most notably, the gender relations on both estates were patriarchal. As I have pointed out, this is an important reason for not glamorizing the imagining of the estates as communities, for the very ideals of community articulated by the residents did not represent an egalitarian social arrangement. Instead it supported an unequal power relationship between the sexes, one which advantaged men, and which was an inherent feature of the residents' communities. A woman's place was seen as most

²⁷⁹ See, for instance, J. Eyles, *Senses of Place*, 70-1.

definitely in the home. Second, the structure of the neighbourhoods surrounding the estates were similar too. Both Watling and Roehampton were surrounded by middle-class suburbans.

Beyond this, however, significant differences arose. I have argued that the differences between Roehampton and Watling's social structures meant that there were strong contrasts between the conceptualizations of community of each estate. First, in comparison to Watling, the large number of lower middle-class Roehampton residents was, I have argued, responsible for their ideal of community being essentially more 'reserved'. Community on Roehampton was less grounded in the gregarious nature and public sociability of its tenants not simply because the design and management of the estate, together with a desire on the part of the skilled residents to distinguish themselves as respectable, ensured a culture of privacy, but because this was also encouraged more by the greater number of middle-class residents who lived there.

Second, the fact that the Roehampton residents' feelings of belonging to their community were less sensitised than those of their Watling counterparts was again due in part to the estate's greater proportion of middle-class tenants. With the estate containing many civil servants, some of which had their own domestic servants, it was unsurprisingly imagined quite positively by those in its surrounding area. Admittedly, the estate did not experience the negative press reporting which Watling did, yet with such a 'carefully selected' population such negative reporting would have been difficult. The Roehampton residents, therefore, found themselves less antagonised against; they were rarely made to feel so very different from the house owners in whose midst they had been placed.

Thus, although neither estate was lacking in community from the standpoint of its residents, the conceptualizations of community were not the same. The myths of community that were made concrete in the minds of the residents, in their relationships with one another, and in their uses of public and private space differed between the estates, and were shaped by the ways in which the implications of the class compositions of these estates were lived out. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the conceptualizations of community of the Roehampton Estate Tenants'

Association and the Watling Residents' Association. Their concepts of community, I will show, also differed. In respect to the residents, their 'communities of association' had to be created for the people, not by them. With respect to each other, the community ideals of the Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association were imbued with middle-class values of respectability and moral improvement, values that were not to be seen in the community of the Watling Residents' Association.



Plate 4.1: W.U.S.C. Netball Team, early 1930s
(Source: Mrs. F. Lewinton)



Plate 4.2: W.U.S.C. Summer Camp at West Mersea, Essex, mid-1930s
(Source: Mrs. F. Lewinton)



Plate 4.3: W.U.S.C. Summer Camp at West Mersea, Essex, mid-1930s
(Source: Mrs. F. Lewinton)



Plate 4.4: Mostyn Road, Watling, 1929
(Source: G.L.R.O.)

CHAPTER FIVE - COMMUNITIES OF ASSOCIATION.

A. Introduction.

In Chapter Four I have attempted to cast some doubt on the prevailing wisdom that the inter-war cottage council estates were lacking in community. The estates of Roehampton and Watling, it has been argued, could be imagined as communities by their residents in a variety of ways, with these imaginings grounded in each estate's specific social-historical and geographical circumstances. The purpose of this chapter is, first, to examine the role played on the estates by the Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association [R.E.T.A.] and the Watling Residents' Association [W.R.A.], and then, second, to detail their conceptualizations of community.

The first two sections of the chapter are concerned with matters of aims and organisation. They seek to fully contextualize the specific circumstances within which these institutions and their conceptualizations of community were situated. Particular attention is paid to the nature, aims and activities of the R.E.T.A. and W.R.A., and the view of the Yeos that such bodies were working-class and pursued working-class, mutualist and frequently militant aims is disputed.

In the first section, where the focus is upon the Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association, I show that the Yeos' suggestion is simply misleading. First, during the 1920s and early 1930s at least, the tenants controlling the R.E.T.A. were, I argue, representative of the carefully selected nature of Roehampton's first generation of residents. In 1932, for instance, when the L.C.C. were inviting the estate's 'well-to-do' tenants to leave, the founding members of the Association were fast disappearing. Second, throughout the inter-war period, neither the broad aims nor the varied activities of the R.E.T.A. had a politicised, working-class edge to them. They were certainly not militant. Admittedly, the Association did originally claim to be representative of the tenants' interests and prepared to fight for them if necessary. Rent, for instance, was a sore burden to many tenants and the R.E.T.A. did attempt to obtain a reduction. This, however, was only after strong criticism

from the estate tenants about the Association's inaction. Representations were also made on other issues, such as the provision of a children's playground. These representations, however, are best viewed as a reflection of a recurrent theme within the R.E.T.A.; a desire to complete the development of the estate as a Garden Suburb with the feel of a village. Moreover, safeguarding the interests of the tenants was not the prime concern of the Association. After the acquisition of a meeting place in 1924, the R.E.T.A., I argue, became preoccupied with arranging the sporting, gardening, social and educational life of Roehampton. These were activities that were also permeated by Garden Suburb and village ideals. With the loss of the founders of the Association in the early 1930s, however, only the social life and drinking aspect appeared to retain any significance for those who took over the reins.

In the second section of the chapter, the Watling Residents' Association is considered. It is studied over a much shorter timespan of less than two years for, as Chapter Six will make clear, the W.R.A. did not remain the W.R.A. for any longer than this. Although the Association was certainly of a more working-class nature than its Roehampton counterpart - perhaps unsurprisingly given the occupational status of the estate residents - it is again emphasised that it is inappropriate to characterise the W.R.A. as body with militant and mutualist aims. If anything, the Association was conceived as the exact opposite of this. It was not the prime motive of the W.R.A., I argue, to represent the working class living on Watling. In fact, it did not wish to pursue the objectives of any class for the Association strove to be strictly non-political. The stated aim of the W.R.A. was simply to encourage and develop social activities amongst the tenants and to promote 'Good fellowship' among them. True, the Association did to an extent also approach bodies such as the L.C.C. and the Hendon Urban District Council over issues such as street lighting. Such actions, however, were not conducted along antagonistic lines. Rather, the desire of the W.R.A. was to co-operate in order to have the estate completed and improved. The Association was simply not formed to be a fighting organisation, representing the interests of the working-class, or any other class for that matter.

Although the W.R.A. was not formed to represent and protect the workers of Watling, it was the case that at least some of the residents, especially the Communists on Watling, struggled with the Association's Executive to make it do so. Rather than organising concerts, it was argued that lower rents and the alleviation of distress on the estate should be among the aims of the W.R.A. The founders of the Association, however, successfully resisted these calls. The W.R.A. remained a co-operative and non-antagonistic organisation primarily concerned with organising social activities. It was still a non-political body that was in no way pursuing working-class objectives.

The third section of the chapter is concerned with concepts, the ways in which community was conceptualized and used by the R.E.T.A. and W.R.A. In the case of Roehampton, the R.E.T.A., I argue, saw community in one respect as something that had to be made for the residents, and that it would do this through encouraging friendliness and comradeship amongst them by means of its activities. The R.E.T.A. thought this was particularly necessary because the residents of Roehampton were envisaged as middle-class former residents of suburbia, who had previously lived a life of 'insularity', 'artificiality' and 'snobbish respectability.' There was, however, an added dimension to the Association's ideal of linking the estate residents together through a sense of community. Reflecting the themes which permeated so much of the work of the Association - improvement (or 'uplift'), the Garden Suburb ideal, and village life - the community of the R.E.T.A., I argue, was heavily weighted with notions of not mere respectability, but morality. The R.E.T.A., however, did not just present itself as the basis of such community, but also constructed the idea of the estate as a community whose interests it had at heart. This, I point out, was an especially legitimating construct of community for it presented the R.E.T.A.'s activities as strongly worthy of support.

On the ground, however, there were problems with the Association's views of community which I want to emphasise. First, if its activities were indicative of community, then the community had a strikingly patriarchal nature, much like that of the residents discussed in the previous chapter. Second, only a few of the residents

that I spoke to attributed any importance to the activities of the Association. Admittedly, gardening and the Garden Society was popular, although partly because of its strong encouragement by the L.C.C. The R.E.T.A.'s claims to community, however, need to be evaluated in view of the Association's low levels of membership and the lack of interest it generated amongst the tenants because of their perception of it as a drinking place.

On Watling, although the W.R.A. never once presented itself as working for the community of the estate in the way that the R.E.T.A. did on Roehampton, it did still see itself as creative of community. Reflecting the points I have made in the previous chapter - that some of Watling's residents believed the estate was initially lacking in community because former friends and neighbours had been left behind in London, and that there was no social activity amongst their new ones - the W.R.A. positioned itself as trying to bring the people together. Mainly through its social activities it sought to encourage comradeship and friendship. It wanted to make community for the residents. This, however, was not simply because there was initially no sense of community, but also because the W.R.A. viewed the residents as unable to make their own. This was not, as in the case of the R.E.T.A., because the residents had middle-class values to hinder them, but because they were simply viewed as 'lacking the faculty of quickly making friends.' In common with the R.E.T.A., therefore, the ideal of community of the W.R.A. was centered around the notion of bringing people together in a social sense. In contrast to the R.E.T.A., however, community was limited to such creation of 'horizontal' social bonds between the residents. Community was not associated with any notions of respectability.

I stress again, however, that such a view of community is problematic. This is not simply because a recurrent theme of the previous chapter has been the Watling residents' gregarious nature and inclination towards public sociability - there was no need for the W.R.A. to make community - but also in view of the Association's patriarchal nature and lack of influence on the estate. Women were once more under-represented at all levels within the W.R.A. and presumed only to have an

interest in domestic issues. Again, the Association appealed to only a very small minority of the estate's residents. This was particularly evident in its second year when it began to fragment and other groups catering for the social needs of the tenants developed.

In conclusion I argue that in each case it can be seen that the language of community was used to give meaning, legitimacy and authority to the actions of the Associations. However, I stress, that this was not in the pursuit of militant political aims, for this was not the purpose of either Association. On the contrary, on Watling the W.R.A. envisaged community in the form of closer horizontal social relationships between the tenants of the estate. On Roehampton, this was taken a step further. Community for the R.E.T.A. did not simply involve the removal of the residents' middle-class inhibitions to closer relationships, but was also to be realised by developing the respectable nature of the estate and its tenants and improving their morals. In both cases, however, I reiterate that their creation of such communities were problematic. The ideals of community of both the W.R.A. and R.E.T.A. were patriarchal in their nature and generally unsupported by the residents of the estates.

B. The Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association.

The earliest tenants' group on the Roehampton Estate was the Garden Society, formed in January 1922. Contrary to its name, however, the Society's activities were not restricted solely to gardening for it aimed to develop both the social and sporting life of the estate. This rapidly forced it into negotiations with the London County Council.¹ By April, a Sports sub-committee had been formed and was asking the L.C.C. about land for football, tennis, cricket and children's recreation. In view of the Society's widening scope, the Vice-President, Mr. H.E. Valentine, further informed the Council that it was likely they would develop into a

¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 4 (2) (February 1926), 3-4.

tenants' association.² The following month the members met in a workmen's canteen on the unfinished estate and this transformation took place; the Roehampton Garden Society became the Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association.³

The founding members of the R.E.T.A. were, unsurprisingly, representative of the estate's carefully selected first generation of tenants. As Norman Barnes, who had been the Association's Treasurer, told me:

"Many of the people, the people from the R.E.T.A., many of them would have believed they were middle-class."⁴

Certainly, the artist of the Association's journal - *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* which first came to light in November 1922 - appeared to believe the R.E.T.A. Chairman of 1923, J. Duley, was best caricatured as such (See Plate 5.1). In line with the L.C.C.'s initial policy of preferentially allocating a proportion of its houses to its own employees, at least some of the Association's workers were employed at County Hall. When in 1923 the *London County Council Staff Gazette* commented on *The Roehampton Estate Gazette*, it was noted that "some of the names of its more energetic spirits are familiar as office colleagues."⁵ Moreover, these original energetic spirits were also among the two hundred and one 'well-to-do' tenants who, by 1932, the L.C.C. were to consider too wealthy to remain on Roehampton. In November 1932, for instance, the new Editor of *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* expressed his regret over the recent departure of R.E.T.A. workers from the estate, the most recent to have taken up his abode away from Roehampton being his predecessor in the Editorial Chair, Mr. E.P. Pebody. The departures meant that there were "very few of the original stalwarts who formed the Association ... left to carry on."⁶

The precise aims and purposes of the Association were subject to some initial disagreement amongst these original, founding members. According to the *Gazette*,

² Letter from H.E. Valentine to Chairman of Housing Committee, 6.4.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1 26.

³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 4 (2) (February 1926), 3-4; and (9) (July 1923), 11-5.

⁴ Interview with Mr. Barnes.

⁵ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), 3.

⁶ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 11 (11) (November 1932), 1-2.

the conception of a tenants' association to some of those who attended the canteen meeting was that it should be an "instrument existing only to fight somebody or something." Others were concerned either solely with organising the social side of the estate or with continuing their gardening activities. There was a "clash of dissimilar temperaments." However, a compromise resulted, with the prevailing view being:

"That while the interests of tenants in their relationship to the L.C.C. should be safeguarded (and fought for if necessary), at the same time wider and more general interests should be studied."

By Rule 2 of their constitution, the Central Committee of the newly-formed Association were therefore pledged:

"To improve the conditions of life on the estate; to promote gardening, sports, social gatherings, etc; and generally to protect the interests of the tenants."⁸

During the first ten years of its existence the broad nature of these aims was reflected in two aspects of the R.E.T.A.'s activities. First, to a limited degree it did position itself as a campaigning body, as an 'estate agitation' in the words of the Yeos.⁹ On the issue of rent especially, it did seek to defend the interests of the estate's tenants. The R.E.T.A., however, should not be viewed as a militant body. Rather, its more usual representations to, notably, the London County Council and the Wandsworth Borough Council on issues of general importance to Roehampton's tenants, such as improved street cleaning and the redecoration of houses, are perhaps better characterised as a reflection of a theme which permeated practically all of the Association's work; the attempt to realise one of the initial aims of the Tudor Walters inspired post-war housing programme, the formation of a healthy and attractive garden suburb. Second, the Association continued the earlier attempts of the Garden Society to promote the social, sporting and gardening aspects of estate life, primarily by acquiring a meeting place on the estate for the tenants. Again this

⁷ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), 11-5.

⁸ Letter from C.A. Heiden (hon. sec. of RETA) to Chairman of Housing Committee, 7.8.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSR GEN 1/26.

⁹ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 241.

was an activity involving the Association sometimes pressing the L.C.C. for action. Yet an underlying reason was once more the ideal of creating a garden city with the feel of 'village life'. There was also, however, a third aspect of R.E.T.A. activities that was not explicitly covered by their stated aims and objectives. This was the notion that through primarily educational activities their work as a whole should also improve, or 'uplift', the estate's tenants, and with the acquisition of a meeting place this area of the Association's work was further developed. Once the R.E.T.A. had its own meeting place these last two aspects of the R.E.T.A.'s activities were both quickly prioritised and any initial concern on behalf of the R.E.T.A. to safeguard 'the interests of tenants in their relationship to the L.C.C.' became a secondary issue. With the loss of the middle-class founders of the Association from 1932 onwards, however, much of all the R.E.T.A.'s uplifting work also came to an end. So much so that by 1936 the Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association was widely recognised as not much more than a men's drinking club.

(i) Representing The Tenants.

According to Mr. Barnes, although one of the initial aims of the R.E.T.A. had been to represent the views of the tenants, it had not in fact been required to devote much attention to this. Rather, "because the estate was so well run ... it hadn't much grounds for complaint."¹⁰ There were, however, still occasions and issues which required the Association's Central Committee to attend, as they saw it, "to the more serious side of Estate activity."¹¹ There were two aspects to this. First, a major concern of the tenants was the high level of rents they were charged, and, after some delay and criticism, the Association did pursue ways of ameliorating this. In this respect the R.E.T.A. did act as an 'estate agitation' seeking to safeguard the interests of Roehampton's tenants. This, however, was exceptional, and ultimately the Association's efforts were also unsuccessful. Second, and more frequently, the L.C.C. and Wandsworth Borough Council, amongst others, were approached and

¹⁰ Interview with Mr. Barnes

¹¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), 11-5.

representations made that they should either maintain or improve aspects of the estate. Such issues included, for instance, the standard of housing to be built, the level of street cleaning and the need for a children's playground. Although such action was obviously in the interests of the tenants, to characterise this as militant agitating is inappropriate, I argue, for the basis of the R.E.T.A.'s representations was a desire to "help in the formation of a healthy and attractive garden suburb."¹²

An early indication of the importance the tenants of Roehampton attached to the need for lower rents came in March 1922 when, before the R.E.T.A. had been formed, the L.C.C. Housing Committee were presented with a residents' petition calling for reduced rents, signed by 171 of the then 372 tenants living on the estate.¹³ This was of course in spite of the carefully selected nature of Roehampton's tenants, yet should not be viewed as particularly surprising for, as Jarmain notes, the depression of the early and middle 1920s undoubtedly reduced earnings and frequently did make rents "a real burden."¹⁴ Indeed, as Mrs. F.A. Songhurst, the R.E.T.A.'s Honorary Secretary, explained to the chairman of the Housing Committee when the Association first took up the matter in December 1922:

"Consequent upon the heavy and continuous fall in salaries and wages, the question of rents has become of very serious concern to tenants residing on this estate."¹⁵

Although the question of rents was of serious concern to the tenants of Roehampton, to the R.E.T.A., however, it was initially of somewhat less concern. The Association was slow to even begin to make representations to the Council. Nine months after the initial petition, Mrs. Songhurst only did so after the Central Committee had been "urgently pressed."¹⁶ Further, the Association was still less than enthusiastic about the task and, in fact, most pessimistic about the chances of

¹² Letter from F.A. Songhurst to Chairman of Housing Committee, 8.10.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

¹³ Petition presented to the Housing Committee, 29.3.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7465.

¹⁴ J.R. Jarmain, *Housing Subsidies and Rents*, 64.

¹⁵ Letter from F.A. Songhurst to Chairman of Housing Committee, 27.12.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

¹⁶ Letter from F.A. Songhurst to Chairman of Housing Committee, 27.12.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

any success in the issue. Admittedly, after Mrs. Songhurst had approached the L.C.C., the Committee did start gathering information in an attempt to formulate a case for the reduction of rent.¹⁷ Yet their conclusions were far from encouraging. Stressing both the high cost of the estate's houses and the extensive subsidies from which the L.C.C.'s tenants already benefited, the *Gazette*, for instance, informed Roehampton's tenants that:

“Rent reductions are not so easily obtained, even if the L.C.C. were entirely sympathetic in this matter, they are almost powerless in the face of the Ministry of Health's policy and rulings.”¹⁸

Appreciative, however, of the “street corner criticism” that their lack of action was prompting, the R.E.T.A. Committee did arrange a meeting of tenants in early February 1923 at Roehampton Parish Hall to discuss the “Rent Question.”¹⁹ If the change in the Association's stance on the issue is any measure, the strength of the tenants' feeling expressed at the meeting was considerable. Within days rather than months Mrs. Songhurst was once again writing to the Housing Committee, not merely to point out that the rent levels were concerning the tenants, but to convey the “resolution unanimously adopted” that:

“The rents now being charged upon the estate are out of all proportion to the means of the said tenants, in view of the general fall of wages. ... This meeting demands that the L.C.C. take immediate steps to revise the rents in accordance with present day conditions.”²⁰

Then, when a new Central Committee was elected at the end of March, “it was agreed to press in every way possible the question of rent reduction.”²¹

One aspect of this was to attend a Municipal Tenants' Conference that was to be held at Essex Hall on April 21st, and to table a resolution for discussion there. Neville Chamberlain, the Minister of Health, was, as a result, visited in June by a deputation from the National Labour Housing Association and the Federation of

¹⁷ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 9.

¹⁸ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (4) (February 1923), 13.

¹⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (4) (February 1923), 6, 13.

²⁰ Letter from F.A. Songhurst to Chairman of Housing Committee, 10.2.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

²¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (7) (May 1923), 4.

Tenants' League, asking for lower rents for municipal houses.²² A second aspect was to further campaign not only to the L.C.C., but also to the local Member of Parliament, Samuel Samuel. Thus, Samuel was also visited at the House of Commons in June by a deputation, consisting of R.E.T.A. Central Committee members Mrs. White and Messrs. Duley, Heiden and Jamison, and asked to raise the tenants' case for a re-consideration of rent levels in Parliament. A week later, the Roehampton estate's two L.C.C. members, William Hunt and Angus Scott, were similarly visited. No tangible result arose from the Association's increased action, however. The *Gazette* could only report that:

"The situation apparently is that the L.C.C. can let the houses on the Roehampton Estate over and over again, and until there is a general falling of rents, or a reconsideration of rents throughout the country, the question has little chance of being adequately discussed in the Council Chamber."²³

Bereft on ideas of how to campaign further on the level of rents - "it would be helpful if suggestions as to future plans were sent to the Central Committee" - the R.E.T.A. did not, however, drop the matter entirely.²⁴ Rather there was a brief, half-hearted attempt to persuade the L.C.C. to relax its regulation prohibiting sub-letting so as to ease the rent burden tenants faced. Although the R.E.T.A. agreed that the regulations should be sufficiently stringent to prevent overcrowding, it was suggested to W.J. Berry, the L.C.C. Housing Estates Manager, that they could still be flexible enough to permit tenants' incomes to be supplemented by accommodating a "paying guest."²⁵ Again, however, the Association's effort was in vain for the L.C.C.'s response was that rather than sub-letting, tenants should perhaps consider moving to smaller, cheaper houses.²⁶

Not only was the issue of rents only seriously pursued by the members of R.E.T.A.'s Central Committee after criticism and pressure from the tenants they were supposed to represent, but it was also unrepresentative of the other matters on

²² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (7) (May 1923), 4; and (9) (July 1923), 30.

²³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (10) (August 1923), 33-6.

²⁴ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (10) (August 1923), 33-6.

²⁵ Letter from F.A. Songhurst to W.J. Berry, 11.11.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

²⁶ Letter from F. Hunt to F.A. Songhurst, 13.11.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1 26.

which the Association campaigned. More commonly the concern of the R.E.T.A. was characteristic of a desire to make the estate a 'healthy and attractive garden suburb.' It was part of the Association's philosophy that:

"No matter whether the sojourn of a tenant on the Estate is to be of long or short duration, it is his [*sic*] duty to try to leave it better than he found it."²⁷

In line with this, therefore, the members predominantly campaigned on issues that were intended mainly to either maintain or improve the estate. For instance, at various times throughout the 1920s, the Libraries Committee of Wandsworth Borough Council was approached and told of the tenants' need for a branch library, while the London General Omnibus Company were asked to provide better services.²⁸ Similarly, representations were made to the L.C.C. on issues as diverse as the damage caused to allotments by workmen, the lighting of roads around the school, access to maisonette gardens, the nuisance on Sundays of both non-resident footballers and street hawkers, and the redecoration of houses.²⁹

There were some concerns that were pressed more firmly than others. When, for instance, the Wandsworth Borough Council initially refused in 1922 and early 1923 to accept responsibility for street cleaning on the estate, the tenants became "most perturbed and indignant at the dreadful state of the roads."³⁰ The subject was "uppermost in the minds of tenants", and matters, it was argued, would soon reach a climax if the "disgraceful state of affairs" was not remedied.³¹ One Central Committee member, Mr. E. Thompson, chose to protest by failing to pay a proportion of his rates, with the result that he was summoned to appear before the Justices at Wandsworth County Court. This was a line of action, the R.E.T.A. suggested, that other tenants might wish to consider.³² Later in the same year,

²⁷ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), 11-5.

²⁸ See, for instance, *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 9; and (7) (May 1923), 4.

²⁹ Letter from F.A. Songhurst to Chairman of Housing Committee, 17.1.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26. *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (4) (March 1924), 9; and 7 (12) (December 1928), 2, 9.

³⁰ Letter from J. Duley to F. Hunt, 22.11.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/26.

³¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 3, 9.

³² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (4) (February 1923), 19.

“further strong representations” were made to the Borough Council over foul smelling drains and manholes on the estate, prompting the R.E.T.A. to report that “the Committee are determined that this menace to our health must quickly and permanently be removed from our midst.”³³ Similarly, the London County Council were repeatedly pressed by the Association, working in collaboration with the Parents’ Committee of Huntingfield Road School from 1924, on the need for a children’s playground, a speed limit in Dover House Road, and the removal of a fence blocking the views of motorists.³⁴

One matter in particular that was of “great concern” to the tenants exemplified the middle-class and skilled working-class composition of the Association. In 1922 just as George Elkington of the Putney protest committee against the Roehampton estate voiced to the L.C.C. his fears that the development of the upper part of the estate would ‘lower generally the class of tenant’, so too did the R.E.T.A. Although the Association hoped that it was just a groundless rumour that the Council planned to erect houses of a type inferior to those already occupied, the situation was still “regarded by the tenants as of such serious moment” to warrant “strong representation” by the R.E.T.A. As Mrs. Songhurst explained to the Housing Committee, the inferior houses would attract a class of tenant “comparing unfavourably” with the present ones, and the neighbourhood would come to possess the “undesirable features of a poor class locality.” The garden suburb ideal would be jeopardised, she argued, for the Council’s policy would “speedily result in a great lowering of the tone of the estate.”³⁵

To an extent, therefore, the R.E.T.A. did attempt to represent the views and interests of the residents of Roehampton. Lower rents were pursued by deputation to the Ministry of Health, to Members of Parliament and to the L.C.C., and by joint effort with other post-war estates. The Association was, however, unsuccessful in this area of its work. Moreover, such campaigning was only undertaken after strong

³³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (12) (October 1923), 4.

³⁴ See, for instance, *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (7) (June 1924), 4.

³⁵ Letter from F.A. Songhurst to Chairman of Housing Committee, 8.10.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

pressure from the tenants. Political action was not the overriding concern of the Association. The rent question aside, the representations of the R.E.T.A. should rather be seen as part of a quest for a healthy garden suburb, the respectability of which the Association wished to preserve exclusively for its middle-class and skilled working-class members.

(ii) The Sporting, Gardening And Social Side.

Besides campaigning to bodies such as the L.C.C. and Wandsworth Borough Council on behalf of the estate's tenants, whether for lower rents or the completion of their estate as a garden suburb, a second major aim of the R.E.T.A. was to continue the earlier efforts of the Garden Society to cater for the tenants' sporting, gardening and social interests. Although these activities overlapped somewhat, social concerns were prioritised by the Association and their attention became focused upon the acquisition of Putney Park House, a pre-existing villa close to the centre of the estate, to act as the Association's meeting place and headquarters. To a degree this again involved the R.E.T.A. pressing the L.C.C., yet the Association's aims, in part at least, were once more to transform Roehampton into a garden suburb and the dealings with the Council usually took the form more of negotiations than representations.³⁶

Some months after the initial inquiry of the Sports Sub-Committee of the Garden Society to the L.C.C. about land for the tenants' recreation, the R.E.T.A. also began to pursue the issue. Tennis and bowls both appear to have been the favoured sports of many of the tenants. There was a "necessity for immediate action" in forming a club for them.³⁷ In line with this, therefore, one of the first actions of the Association was to ask the Council about the possibility of greens and courts for these to be played upon.³⁸ Other sports were also developed. In 1923 a football

³⁶ See, for instance, *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), 11-5.

³⁷ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (2) (December 1922), 18.

³⁸ See, for instance, *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (2) (December 1922), 18. Letter from C.A. Heiden to Chairman of Housing Committee, 7.8.22. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

club was formed, which was soon “flourishing” despite the lack of a pitch.³⁹ The following year, a golf club was successfully launched, as was a “ladies” hockey club.⁴⁰ Late in 1932 a cricket team was also organised.⁴¹ Annually arranged too, initially in association with the estate school, was an Estate Sports’ Festival. At the first, in June 1923, there were, in addition to the sports, concerts by the school children and adults, dancing in the evening, and side shows such as coconut shies. It was “a glorious day.”⁴² This was a pattern repeated over the years, though with the later help of the Gardening Society the “village sports” and other activities were accompanied by flower and vegetable displays.⁴³ (See Plate 5.2).

Gardening interests, which formed “such a big feature of Estate life”, continued to be organised by the Garden Society, run as a sub-section of the R.E.T.A., with membership restricted from 1925 to members of the Association.⁴⁴ It was the Society’s aim “to help all the amateur gardeners to beautify the Estate ... by means of Lectures, Flower Shows and Garden Competitions, and by the co-operative buying of gardening requisites.”⁴⁵ This was especially the case, no doubt, in view of “the grim struggle of the early days of our tenancy among the wilds of this our Garden Suburb.”⁴⁶ Although a lack of accommodation for the lectures initially ruled these out, annual flower, vegetable and garden shows were organised from 1922 onwards, originally as separate events to the Sports Festivals. At the second show in 1923, for instance, prize money for exhibits totalled over £30, with £5 each going to the tenants adjudged to have the best front and back gardens.⁴⁷ (See Plate 5.3). There was also a “scheme of co-operative trading ... ensuring a saving to members of

³⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (1) (December 1923), 4.

⁴⁰ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (8) (July 1924), 5; and 2 (10) (September 1924), 13.

⁴¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 11 (11) (November 1932), 17.

⁴² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (10) (August 1923), 3.

⁴³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 6 (7) (July 1927), 1.

⁴⁴ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), 11-5; and 3 (3) (March 1925), 18.

⁴⁵ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (2) (January 1924), 13-5.

⁴⁶ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (2) (December 1922), 17.

⁴⁷ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), no page number.

quite 20 per cent. off ordinary retail prices.”⁴⁸ A roller, garden tools and lawn mowers were also collectively purchased and hired out to the Society’s members, while members wishing to exchange plants were asked to communicate through the Secretary.⁴⁹

In addition to encouraging both sporting and gardening activities, however, from September 1922 the R.E.T.A had also taken up the duties of providing social recreation for the tenants of Roehampton.⁵⁰ Before the turn of the year, a “house warming party”, a whist drive and a combined whist drive and dance had been held at Huntingfield Road School.⁵¹ A Christmas dance and fancy dress carnival, at which the scene was “animated”, was also held outside the estate in Roehampton Memorial Hall.⁵² Although the R.E.T.A. believed these events to have been successful, many believed Roehampton Village to be too far to travel to, while the school was too small and costly for the Association’s purposes.⁵³ Moreover, again in view of the Association’s garden suburb ideal, it was argued that:

“Our Estate ... has a rural setting reminiscent of a compact village. ... the village ideal is a healthy one, deserving to be fostered, and suggestions mooted in the journal for providing social amenities within the confines of the Estate should have more than positive support. ... The first essential is to provide the village hall.”⁵⁴

Their immediate objective became, therefore, “a building which the Tenants can call theirs and to which they can always look to when requiring social functions of all descriptions.”⁵⁵ As R. Sudell of the Central Committee informed the L.C.C.’s Valuer, there was “the need for a Social Centre ... to provide a meeting place for the various activities of the tenants.”⁵⁶

⁴⁸ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (7) (May 1923), 19.

⁴⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (5) (April 1924), 5-7.

⁵⁰ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (4) (February 1923), 6.

⁵¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (4) (February 1923), 6.

⁵² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 28-30.

⁵³ Letter from R. Sudell (R.E.T.A.) to F. Hunt, 18.2.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

⁵⁴ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 15.

⁵⁵ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (4) (February 1923), 6.

⁵⁶ Letter from R. Sudell to F. Hunt, 18.2.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

Despite an early suggestion from a resident that the tenants should build themselves a hut, the R.E.T.A.'s plans centred on the conversion of Putney Park House, an empty nineteenth-century villa close to the centre of the estate, into a Club and Institute.⁵⁷ Negotiations to rent the house and its grounds from the L.C.C. began in February 1923 and proceeded smoothly albeit somewhat slowly, prompting a writer in the *Gazette* - after inviting passers-by to "enter this our Garden Village, and explore" - to lament:

"The Institute! I regret to say that we don't possess such a thing at present. We have no place in which the ancients and 'highbrows' of the village may foregather in order to swap yarns just yet. Oh! we will see to that some day. We must bide our time, we may yet realise our ambition in making this 'the most charming Garden Suburb of London'."⁵⁸

If there was one initial area of disagreement, it was the Association's intention to run a bar within the club, not as "the be-all and end-all of club activity", but to generate profits to support the rest of the scheme.⁵⁹ Mr. Berry, for instance, did not think the Council would approve and advised the tenants, in view of the opposition that might be raised to the scheme, not to apply for permission.⁶⁰

"From my knowledge ... of the Committee's views I can hold out very little hope of their agreeing to the premises being licensed."⁶¹

The R.E.T.A. persevered, however, and with the intervention of Colonel Levita, the Chairman of the Housing Committee, the established policy of the L.C.C. not to allow the sale of alcohol on their estates was not applied to Roehampton - "one of their most favoured estates." For as Levita explained:

"The character of the estate was such that the conditions of the license would be strictly adhered to, and that the license would be regarded as a purely secondary and not as the primary reason for the existence of that Club."⁶²

⁵⁷ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (2) (December 1922), 20-1; and (9) (July 1923), 11-5.

⁵⁸ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (1) (December 1923), 21-2.

⁵⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (11) (October 1924), 13-5.

⁶⁰ Notes of an interview between representatives of the L.C.C. and the R.E.T.A., 9.3.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

⁶¹ Letter from W.J. Berry to F.A. Songhurst, 6.4.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1 26.

⁶² *Wandsworth Borough News*, 6.6.24., 12.

By March 1924 negotiations were completed and Putney Park House was let to the R.E.T.A. at a rent of £3 a week, rising to £4 when the estate superintendent vacated two rooms in the basement that served as his temporary office.⁶³ It was the “hearty desire” of Mr. Berry that it would become a “centre for pleasant recreation and enjoyment.” At the end of May Samuel Samuel opened the Club and Institute.⁶⁴ There was now accommodation for whist drives, dances and concerts, for the trading and lecturing activities of the Garden Society, and for the rehearsals of the Musical Society, formed in mid-1923 with Mr. R. Coe as Secretary.⁶⁵ (See Plate 5.4). With the help of an interest-free loan of £1000 from Samuel, four tennis courts were also available in line with the much expressed tenants’ wishes. Badminton was also planned.⁶⁶ Further,

“For the ladies daintily furnished drawing, tea and music rooms have been provided, while among the attractions for the men are a billiard room, card room, and fully licensed refreshment department.”⁶⁷

The scheme had been “designed to stimulate and maintain the interest of a good class of tenant.”⁶⁸ The club was to “create the village spirit without the pettiness of the village.”⁶⁹ As Mr. Sudell proclaimed at the opening ceremony, he hoped the tenants could now make the estate “into a little garden city.”⁷⁰

(iii) Uplifting The Tenants.

The activities of the R.E.T.A., however, were not restricted solely to pressing official bodies, either to reduce rents or improve the estate, nor to organising various

⁶³ Notes of an interview between representatives of the L.C.C. and the R.E.T.A., 29.10.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26. Report of the Housing Committee, 4.3.24., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1924* (London, 1924), 375-6.

⁶⁴ Letter from W.J. Berry to G.V. Songhurst, 29.5.24. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26. *Wandsworth Borough News*, 6.6.24., 12.

⁶⁵ Letter from F.A. Songhurst to W.J. Berry, 1.12.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26. *The Roehampton Estate Gazette*, (9) (July 1923), 7.

⁶⁶ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (4) (March 1924), 11.

⁶⁷ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 6.6.24., 12.

⁶⁸ Letter from F.A. Songhurst to F. Hunt, 28.7.23. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

⁶⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (11) (October 1924), 15.

⁷⁰ *Wandsworth Borough News*, 6.6.24., 12.

social, sporting and gardening events. There was also a “ready interest in education shown by the tenants’ representatives”, which was once again closely connected to the Association’s village ideal.⁷¹ As the *Gazette* put it:

“The development of educational facilities on the estate has a very important local aspect, and the ‘attempt to capture the village spirit’ is deserving of encouragement both by the London County Council and its tenants.”⁷²

Initially, educational articles within the *Gazette* catered for this area of interest.

Later, with the acquisition of Putney Park House, the educational work of the Association was given added emphasis. Evening classes were started and ‘uplifting’ societies formed, including, for instance, drama and debating groups.

That the R.E.T.A. saw itself as responsible for educational matters on Roehampton was apparent from its very earliest activities, most notably through the medium of the *Gazette*. In the second issue, for instance, an article entitled “Hygiene” was devoted to explaining to the tenants the importance of good food to health.⁷³ Subsequent issues then pursued equally enlightening topics. “Nature Notes”, for instance, were presented in a regular series of articles in order to acquaint the tenants with their new rural environment, discoursing on the finer points of dormice, honey bees and the little red squirrel, to name but three.⁷⁴ Similarly, there were also lengthy commentaries on both nearby Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common, to which the educational aspect was clear to see. Of Wimbledon Common, for instance, it was noted that:

“Unfortunately many of those who choose it for an afternoon’s ramble are totally unacquainted with the wealth of History and Geography which may be advantageously studied while engaged upon this health giving exercise. It is the object of these few notes to awaken an intelligent interest in the men [*sic*] and things connected with the Common, from the earliest dawn of time until the present day.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 3 (11) (November 1925), no page number.

⁷² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 3 (11) (November 1925), 3.

⁷³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette*, (2) (December 1922), 12-3.

⁷⁴ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (10) (August 1923), 19-20; (12) (October 1923), 9; and 2 (7) (June 1924), 29.

⁷⁵ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (2) (January 1924), 26-7.

After the formation of the Musical Society, “the popular and gifted” Mr. Coe began to contribute “Musical Notes” each month too. His first article in January 1924 describing the life of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was not to be atypical. The following month he presented a history of “madrigals and glees”.⁷⁶

Once Putney Park House was obtained by the R.E.T.A. there was greater scope for the educational desires and aims of the Association, and the work was carried out with increasing vigour. Although the Club and Institute had previously only been discussed in terms of its importance to the social life of Roehampton, it was now argued that:

“A balance should be preserved between the ordinary indoor life of a social club, and activities that are of an educational or beneficent nature. ... the club scheme should in its entirety be uplifting.”⁷⁷

In view of this, for instance, and also no doubt because the Association now had meeting rooms available outside the confines of members’ homes, negotiations with the L.C.C. began in late 1924 about help with providing instruction and materials for evening classes. These were seen to “open up interesting possibilities for the Estate”, and the Association felt certain that developments would be “awaited with interest by the residents generally.” Among the subjects to be taught were dressmaking, millinery, elocution, first aid and home nursing, and gymnastics.⁷⁸

Plans were also made for the formation of suitably uplifting societies, at which perhaps the tenants’ improved elocution could be demonstrated.⁷⁹ By September 1924, a Literary and Debating Society had been formed, with Mrs. Belham undertaking the duties of Secretary, and the initial topics of discussion being “Vocational Guidance”, “Can War Be Abolished”, and “A Little Memoir Of The Seventeenth Century.”⁸⁰ The membership in November was thirty-one, “a very

⁷⁶ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (2) (January 1924), 6-7; and 2 (3) (February 1924), 5.

⁷⁷ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (11) (October 1924), 13-5.

⁷⁸ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (13) (December 1924), 4-5, 11.

⁷⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (8) (July 1924), 5.

⁸⁰ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (10) (September 1924), 6; and 2 (11) (October 1924), 4.

small proportion,” according to the *Gazette*, “of the total membership of the Club and Institute.” It was hoped, however, that the numbers would be:

“considerably augmented before the end of the session, and that the society will next session prove to be a real educational force on the Estate.”⁸¹

Within a year, a Dramatic Society came to fruition as well. It was known as the Quixotic Players and was affiliated to the British Drama League.⁸² The uplifting effect was such that “at rehearsals one notices the faces of all members lit with a smile of hope and joy.”⁸³ The work of the Garden Society and Musical Society meanwhile was also viewed with “satisfaction”, for these activities were also “regarded as educational.”⁸⁴

(iv) Changing Priorities.

With the Club and Institute up and running, the R.E.T.A. was devoting much of its time to the social and educational life of the estate, with the added bonus to the tenants of a few games of tennis and the like. Over the next few years these activities, or ‘club interests’ as they were called, came to take priority over any desire on the part of the Association to safeguard the tenants’ interests. So much so that tenants even made their own representations to the L.C.C. independent of the R.E.T.A. Admittedly, accommodation was being provided within Putney Park House for a medical and dental service and a branch of the Putney Infant Welfare Centre; activities of undoubted benefit to the tenants.⁸⁵ The Association though was not organising these activities, but only sub-letting the accommodation. By the early 1930s, however, and coincident with the loss of the middle-class founders of the R.E.T.A., the concerns of the Association became further restricted. Not just was the R.E.T.A. no longer campaigning on behalf of the estate’s tenants, but the educational side of its work was neglected too. With the Association concentrating

⁸¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (12) (November 1924), 13.

⁸² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 3 (10) (October 1925), 14.

⁸³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 4 (2) (February 1926), 7.

⁸⁴ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (11) (October 1924), 13-5.

⁸⁵ Letter from H. Sheasby to F. Hunt, 23.11.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

on solely social and sporting activities, Putney Park House became widely perceived, to those outside at least, as little more than a men's drinking club.

An early indication of the overriding importance the R.E.T.A. attached to the Club and Institute was amply displayed once it became known that the Committee had been successful in acquiring Putney Park House:

"The Club and Institute scheme eclipses all other matters at the moment, and the Committee are to be congratulated on the results of their efforts. The Report of the Association for the year is a record of sustained and useful effort in many directions, but even if the Committee had nothing else to their credit the successful negotiation of such a scheme as this would fully justify their existence."⁸⁶

The activities of the Association, it was argued, were now about to "take a new interest."⁸⁷ This new interest, however, was not to be one centred upon safeguarding the tenants' concerns, despite previous assurances otherwise from the R.E.T.A. It had in fact been stressed to the tenants that the Club and Institute scheme would help strengthen the Association and allow it to press harder on the issue of rents while also establishing schemes of mutual support to alleviate hardship:

"The only way of forcing the tenants' point of view on rent and other subjects is by collective action, and that is where the creation of the Club and Institute should become a matter of vital interest to tenants here. If the scheme is so designed so as to enable the maximum number to participate, tenants will, by supporting it, bring into being an organisation which can not only take action towards rent reduction, but ease, in the meantime, by mutual co-operation, individual hardship due to rent and other causes."⁸⁸

Yet this had not happened. First, once Putney Park House had been opened, schemes of mutual co-operation were rare. Certainly, the Garden Society was able to loan out garden tools and exchange flowers between its members, yet beyond this the Association did very little. Possibly the best the R.E.T.A. achieved was an 'Exchange and Mart' scheme for club members and an attempt (that failed) to build up a library from books and magazines that the tenants no longer wanted.⁸⁹ Second,

⁸⁶ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (4) (March 1924), 3.

⁸⁷ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (5) (April 1924), 3.

⁸⁸ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (7) (May 1923), 13-5.

⁸⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (9) (August 1924), 3; and 2 (7) (June 1924), 4.

if the schemes of mutual co-operation were rare, then examples of collective action to force the tenants' point of view were almost non-existent, for as the Editor of the *Gazette* pointedly remarked in October 1925:

“The advent of the Club and Institute turned the attention of the Tenants' Association from the purpose for which it was originally formed - that of safeguarding the general interests of tenant members.”⁹⁰

Admittedly, the Association did still occasionally make representations to various bodies on behalf of the tenants, yet this was frequently only after the Editor of the *Gazette* had urged the Central Committee to do so. Having criticised the members' tendency “to centre themselves upon ‘club interests’,” for instance, he suggested that the Association campaign for rents to be equally spread among tenants.⁹¹ Several months later, he highlighted the need to approach the new gas company in the area and ask them to supply the estate.⁹² Improved bus services through the estate and later the installation of electricity supplies were among other issues that were presented as neglected work for the Association to take up.⁹³ At times, however, the Association's lack of activity was such that tenants outside of the R.E.T.A. were forced to make their own representations. In July 1927, for instance, the *Gazette* Editor had protested about the lack of accommodation at Huntingfield Road School, with some children having to attend the church school in Roehampton Village, yet the R.E.T.A. had not seen fit to pursue the matter.⁹⁴ Instead it was left to an independent committee of tenants to send their own deputation to the L.C.C. the following year, albeit with the generous “best wishes of the Tenants' Association.”⁹⁵

This increasing neglect on behalf of the R.E.T.A. to further and protect the interests of the tenants on Roehampton was not, however, the only aspect of the

⁹⁰ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 3 (10) (October 1925), 3-4.

⁹¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 3 (10) (October 1925), 3-4.

⁹² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 4 (3) (March 1926), 3.

⁹³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 7 (11) (November 1928), 1; and 11 (11) (November 1932), 1.

⁹⁴ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 6 (7) (July 1927), 4.

⁹⁵ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 7 (12) (December 1928), 10.

Association's work to change over the years. In much the same way as the acquisition of Putney Park House signalled an end to the Association's campaigning activities as the social and educational side came to predominate, the loss of the middle-class founders of the Association from 1932 onwards precipitated an equally significant change in their activities. At this point, the 'ready interest in education shown by the tenants' representatives' and to an extent their promotion of sport came to an abrupt end as the social activities of the Association became the focus of their attention.

The Debating Society, Musical Society and educational classes were all discontinued, as was production of the *Gazette*. Further, despite the hugely expensive outlay on the tennis courts, they were allowed to fall into disuse. Similarly, the grounds of Putney Park House, which had initially been used for croquet and clock golf and were tended by the Garden Society, were permitted to run to seed. The bar, in particular, it was argued, was the cause of this deterioration. It had "always offered serious competition and, eventually, proved such a greater attraction."⁹⁶ Within Putney Park House, for instance, only the bar and steward's quarters had been kept in a reasonable state of repair. As the estate Superintendent, Mr. Hobbs, damningly reported to the L.C.C. Valuer when asked about the nature and extent of the R.E.T.A.'s activities:

"I have for some long time had Putney Park House under observation because I felt that the Tenants' Association were doing very little in the interests of the estate tenants beyond catering for those who would make the house just a place where drink could be obtained at club prices and billiards played. The appearance of the place, both outside and inside, suggested a lack of all other interests."⁹⁷

(v) Conclusion.

In this section I have attempted to provide a detailed description of the nature, aims and activities of the Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association. In

⁹⁶ Letter from P.W. Herapath (Head, Hotham Road General Evening Institute) to the Education Officer, 14.7.38. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

⁹⁷ Superintendent's Report on Putney Park House and the R.E.T.A., 8.9.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

contrast to the suggestion of the Yeos, I have argued that it is inappropriate to characterise the Association as a working-class organisation with frequently mutualist and militant activities. First, as I have pointed out in Chapter Three, the first generation of tenants on Roehampton were carefully selected by the L.C.C. on both ideological and financial grounds, with the result that many of them were either middle-class or at least drawn from the skilled working class. For the first ten years of its existence, this was a class structure mirrored within the R.E.T.A. It was a middle-class association. At least some of the members, for instance, were civil servants, and once the Council began to ask those tenants considered too wealthy to remain on the estate to leave, there were very soon few of the founder members remaining. The Association had even urged the L.C.C. not to lower the class of tenant.

Second, both the diverse aims and activities of the Association do not fit the description of either militant or mutualist. Certainly, the R.E.T.A. Central Committee did undertake to safeguard the interests of the estate's tenants, and the Association did to an extent agitate on behalf of those tenants. They were active on the issue of lower rents, for instance. It needs to be remembered, however, that this was only after pressure and criticism from tenants over the Association's lack of action. Moreover, other issues upon which the Association campaigned were not directed by any form of militancy, but rather a desire for the completion of their estate in the manner it had originally been designed, as a Garden Suburb. This was a theme obviously of some importance to the R.E.T.A. for it was apparent in most other aspects of its work.

As I have pointed out in Chapter One, the Garden Suburb is not a neutral idea. Implicit in the R.E.T.A.'s imagining of the cottage *council* estate of Roehampton as a Garden Suburb are notions of a new life - a new civilization - in comparison to the miseries of the metropolis. A new life of equality, closeness and morality in contrast to the uncontrollable forces unleashed by the Industrial Revolution and attendant urbanization of England. Further, the ideal of village life - equally stressed by the R.E.T.A. - carries with it very similar notions. It reflects an

almost nostalgic desire to escape from the fears and turmoils of modern urban life to the vanished England of old. This is an England where the land was green and pleasant and where there was stability, order and contentment. A very respectable and very moral way of life.

The campaigning side of the Association was to become only a minor aspect of its activities. From its very inception, the R.E.T.A. had also undertaken to cater for the tenants' sporting, gardening and social interests. With the acquisition of Putney Park House to act as the Association's headquarters and meeting place, these interests, I have argued, together with a strong desire to educate and uplift, rapidly superceded the Association's efforts to represent the views and needs of the tenants of Roehampton. Tennis, garden shows and elocution lessons were preferred to deputations to the L.C.C. Club interests became so central to the affairs of the R.E.T.A. that the Editor of the *Gazette* felt the need to repeatedly highlight issues faced by the tenants that needed to be acted upon, whilst some residents also took it upon themselves to act independently of the Association.

Further changes in the emphasis placed by the R.E.T.A. on the various areas of its work came with the loss of its middle-class founders from the early 1930s onwards. Although the character of the estate, in the view of the Chairman of the Housing Committee, had previously been such that the bar within Putney Park House would not be the prime attraction of the Association's work, this was no longer the case. The educational aspects of the R.E.T.A.'s work were discontinued, Putney Park House and its grounds allowed to fall into disrepair, and the *Gazette* no longer produced. By 1937, Putney Park House, at least as far as the L.C.C. was concerned, was solely a place for playing billiards and drinking.

C. The Watling Residents' Association.

Having detailed the nature, aims and activities of the R.E.T.A., I now wish to turn my attention to the equivalent organisation of tenants formed on the Watling Estate - the Watling Residents' Association. The purpose of this section is once

again to highlight the difficulties inherent within the Yeos' characterisation of the cottage council estates' tenants' bodies in general, and the W.R.A. in particular, as working-class and frequently militant organisations pursuing mutualist aims. Certainly, bearing in mind the occupational structure of the estate (described in Chapter Three) and the tendency of the Watling residents to associate themselves with a more working-class way of life (described in Chapter Four), I do not dispute that the W.R.A. had a membership with more working-class values than its Roehampton contemporary. The point that I do wish to emphasise, however, is that its objects and activities were far more complex than the Yeos suggest since it was the aim of the Association's founders that politics should have no place in their work. The W.R.A. was conceived not as 'fighting' body which would represent Watling's working-class tenants, but as one which would simply organise their social life and promote fellowship, or more specifically 'good fellowship', amongst them. In particular, the acquisition of a meeting place to act as the centre of the estate's social life was the focus of their attention. This is not to say that the L.C.C. and other official bodies were never pressed by the Association on various matters. Yet when they were the W.R.A.'s approach was not antagonistic, and nor was it militant. Their concerns were often related to the completion, or improvement, of the estate.

Although the founders of the W.R.A. had not envisaged their organisation as a campaigning body pursuing working-class aims in the interests of the estate tenants, there was, however, from the Association's outset a continuous internal pressure to make it do so. The more communist-inclined members of the W.R.A. repeatedly struggled with the founding members of its Executive Committee to make the Association offer something more than a game of football or a series of whist drives. For instance, the reduction of rent and the use of W.R.A. funds to relieve financially distressed tenants were two of their objectives. I stress, however, that these aims were never realised and, as a result, the Association's activities can not be characterised as militant, or, indeed, particularly in the interests of the working class.

(i) Promoting Good Fellowship Among The Tenants.

In the previous chapter I have detailed at some length the antagonism that the residents of Watling experienced from various directions, including their house-owning neighbours in Mill Hill. The W.R.A., the Yeos explain, was formed at the end of 1927 after vicious attacks on the estate in the local press.⁹⁸ This was indeed the case, the vicious attack coming in December in the form of 'Adsum's' letter to the *Hendon and Finchley Times*. F.E. Bennet, for instance, who was to become the Association's Secretary, wrote to the same newspaper a fortnight later and, having refuted the Mill Hill resident's claims, noted:

"I would like to thank 'Adsum' for having sown the seeds of a Watling Tenants' Association."⁹⁹

From this perspective, however, it is all too easy to assume that the Association originated with its prime reason being to defend and fight for the tenants of Watling. This, I wish to stress, was not the purpose the founders had envisaged. The W.R.A. was to have no political purpose. The aim was rather to develop the residents' social life on Watling, and to an extent to also promote the sporting and gardening side of the estate. It was in these directions that much of their effort was directed.

Following the publication of 'Adsum's' letter, a small group of Watling residents, all men, began to meet at each other's houses and also at the vicarage of Rev. C.E. de R. Copinger, of St. Alphage Church, to discuss how to respond.¹⁰⁰ In addition to Rev. Copinger, amongst the more notable of the residents involved at this point were F.E. Bennet, C.H. Ingram, A.E. Ville, H.G. Rowley and F.C. Mackay.¹⁰¹ Besides just disputing the complaints of the Mill Hill resident through the correspondence columns of the *Hendon and Finchley Times*, it was decided that the time was ripe to attempt to form an Association of residents on the estate. With this

⁹⁸ E. & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of "Community"', 242-3.

⁹⁹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 25.11.27., 13.

¹⁰⁰ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 9.

¹⁰¹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 23.12.27., 6.

in mind, therefore, a meeting was arranged for early January 1928 in St. Alphage Church Hall.¹⁰²

This Association, however, was not envisaged as a body that would represent and fight for the interests of the working-class residents of Watling. This was not because none of the founders held any working-class values and politics. On the contrary, as the estate's occupational structure suggests, the interests of the working class were close to the hearts of at least several of the residents who had arranged the meeting. F.C. Mackay, for instance, was a member of the National Union of Railwaymen and Chairman of the Watling and Burnt Oak Group of the Hendon Labour Party.¹⁰³ He was an active member too. When Hendon Urban District Council were approached and 'requested' to make Watling a ward, for instance, he had led the deputation and stated his class loyalties in no uncertain terms:

"Though we may be of the working class it is no reason why you who are higher in the social scale should trample on us and push us down in the mud. We won't have that, you can rest assured. We shall come back whenever we think the Council is not giving us a reasonable chance."¹⁰⁴

Further, amongst the other founding members both H.G. Rowley and A.E. Ville went on to become Labour councillors for the estate when representation was finally granted.¹⁰⁵

However, within the W.R.A. these, and all other, founding members had chosen to eschew their politics, hoping that they could therefore encourage as broad a cross-section as possible of the estate population to join in their social movement. This point was repeatedly emphasised:

"Our Residents' Association, through its creed of 'Non-political and Non-sectarian,' can embrace any and every resident on the Estate."¹⁰⁶

"It is not interested in political creed or religious belief: these are catered for by other agencies. It places no value on the accident of birth, or on social or

¹⁰² *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 23.12.27., 6.

¹⁰³ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 10.2.28., 9; and *The Watling Resident* 1 (5) (September 1928), 114.

¹⁰⁴ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 30.11.28., 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 14.2.30., 8.

¹⁰⁶ *The Watling Resident* 2 (6) (October 1929), 14.

financial status, on occupation, or on raiment. It only asks that its member be gregarious, that he associate with his fellows in works for the benefit for all.”¹⁰⁷

Despite many of the founding members of the Association having working-class values, therefore, the Association had not been formed to represent them politically. Its objectives had not included any specific action in favour of their particular class interests.

This became evident at the meeting in the Church Hall at which two hundred and fifty people were present.¹⁰⁸ From the views expressed by those who had called the meeting it was clear that they intended to establish an organisation that was neither especially antagonistic nor militant. Mr. Mackay, for instance, who was elected chairman for the evening, outlined the aims of the Association. Its objects, he suggested, should be:

“The promotion of good fellowship and the furtherance of their well-being in such social and other activities as may be found possible.”

The Association, he stressed, he did not want to be formed on antagonistic lines, for he was grateful to the L.C.C. that he had a house on Watling:

“He would like to see their association one that would co-operate with the L.C.C. and the Hendon Council over everything that arose affecting the estate.”¹⁰⁹

Another of the founding members, C.H. Ingram, provided a further insight into the rationale behind the establishment of the Association when later in the year he wrote, under the name of ‘Good Fellowship’, to *The Watling Resident*, the Association’s journal first published in May 1928.¹¹⁰ It was his view that the General Meetings of the W.R.A. were devoting too much time to the question of rent. Although sympathetic with the poverty and hardships many people were enduring, there was no point, he argued, in discussing the level of rents for they had been fixed by the L.C.C., and the residents knew what they were when they moved to the estate. As

¹⁰⁷ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 3.

¹⁰⁸ E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, *Watling Community Association*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 18.1.28., 10.

¹¹⁰ *The Watling Resident* 1 (3) (July 1928), 57-8.

he said, "I believe there is not the slightest likelihood of any reduction."

Furthermore, he insisted that the Association had been formed with other aims in mind:

"This is not a Tenants' or Ratepayers' Association, which is naturally out for one object, viz: reduction of rent or rates, but a *Residents'* Association, whose objects ... contain not one word about rents. ... When the objects of the Association were discussed, the general desire was to give as wide a scope as possible to the Association's activities."¹¹¹

This wide scope, in fact, was to arrange social and sporting activities:

"We had visions of raising a good football club on the Estate, concerts and whist drives to while away the dreary winter evenings, and sports and perhaps a charabanc outing in the summer."¹¹²

The social side, he urged, was the "side we should get on with." Certainly that would be preferable to conducting the Association's activities along antagonistic lines:

"Cut the rent talk, for that is not the primary object of the Association, and look more to the social side. Otherwise you will alienate many members ... who wish to live a quiet, peaceful, pleasant life on the Estate without being continually at war with other bodies."¹¹³

The Association, therefore, was not one that had the goal of furthering the interests of the working class in any political way, rather it was concerned primarily with the development of the estate's social life.

With such ideals in mind, therefore, the W.R.A. had pressed ahead enthusiastically in organising social events for Watling's residents. By March, for instance, the Association's first concert had been held at 'The Old George' Hall, Edgware. The following month a Social and Dance was held there too.¹¹⁴ Then, in late May, there had been a tenants' Fête and Gala arranged in the field adjacent to Burnt Oak Station, with side shows, donkey rides, dancing and sporting events.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Letter from C.H. Ingram. *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 8.

¹¹² Letter from C.H. Ingram. *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 87.

¹¹³ Letter from C.H. Ingram. *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 8.

¹¹⁴ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 4.

¹¹⁵ Letter from F.E. Bennett to W.J. Berry, 8.5.28. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27. R. Durant, *Watling*, 40.

Suggested future additions to the residents' social calendars included charabanc tours to the gardens of, for instance, Hatfield House at Aldenham, an "Association dinner once a year, to cement the bond of good fellowship" and a Civic Service at the Church.¹¹⁶

The arrangement of sporting activities had been pursued too. It was hoped, for instance, that the land next to the station which had been used for the Association's fête could be leased on moderate terms, and used for fêtes, shows, football, cricket and tennis.¹¹⁷ A Ramblers Club and a Cycle and Motorcycle Club were among other activities mooted, and by September Mr. Ingram had formed his much desired football club.¹¹⁸ A Horticultural Sub-section of the Association had also been formed meanwhile. There was a roller and mower available for hire to members, and it was proposed to buy tools, seeds and plants at trade prices to be sold to the residents. There were hopes for a flower show too.¹¹⁹

As on Roehampton, however, the W.R.A. had no meeting place of its own upon the estate, and the Executive Committee was not just content to organise activities for tenants on premises outside of the estate. As early as February 1928, therefore, the W.R.A. had begun to pursue the idea of providing their own building:¹²⁰

"The aim of the Association is to bring us all together, that we may get to know each other better, and become all happy members of the Watling Brotherhood. People cannot meet until they have a house in which to meet ... in which the Association will dispense hospitality to all who come."

Ideally, it was argued, the building would have a large hall for concerts, whist drives and dances, plus rooms for billiards, cards, chess and draughts, ladies and children. There should be a general refreshment room too, "in which food and drink of all kinds should be procurable." Further, it should be set in a garden, surrounded by

¹¹⁶ *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 72.

¹¹⁷ Letter from F.C. Eaton (W.R.A. temporary Secretary) to F. Hunt, 26.6.28. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/27.

¹¹⁸ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 14; & 1 (5) (September 1928), 109.

¹¹⁹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 5.

¹²⁰ Letter from F.E. Bennett to W.J. Berry, 4.2.28. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/27.

tennis courts, playing fields, rugby grounds, swimming pools, running track, and space for open air gatherings such as a fête.

Space for this, however, the W.R.A. noted, was not available, and so they had to be “satisfied to provide a Club House.” This was to be financed by borrowing several thousands of pounds from a brewer, and a club license was seen as essential.¹²¹ In contrast to Roehampton, however, where the character of the estate had been such that Col. Levita personally persuaded the Housing Committee to relax their policy prohibiting licensed tenants’ premises, the W.R.A. were forced to lament that “the L.C.C. have set themselves up as rabid temperance reformers.”¹²² Land, the W.R.A. were told, had already been allotted for a pub, whilst there was also the fear that any Association club house could fall into the hands of the loaning brewer.¹²³ As Rev. Copinger, who had become President of the W.R.A., was informed by the L.C.C., therefore:

“With reference to the question of a club license for the proposed club house, I think you may assume that under no circumstances will the Council allow this.”¹²⁴

The Association’s club house, then, lay “afar off.”¹²⁵ This was a point of some importance, as the next chapter will make clear.

To suggest that the quest for a club house and the promotion of primarily social events for the residents of Watling, with a few sporting and gardening ones thrown in too, was the sole function of the W.R.A. would be somewhat unfair. The Association did, to a limited extent, concern itself with wider issues. Or, to quote Mackay’s words at the Association’s initial meeting, they did concern themselves with ‘the furtherance of their well-being in ... other activities as may be found possible.’

Representations were made to various official bodies that the estate should be properly completed. The education authorities were approached about the delay in

¹²¹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (2) (June 1928), 27.

¹²² *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 74.

¹²³ *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 72.

¹²⁴ Letter from F. Hunt to C.E. de R. Copinger, 3.7.28. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1 27.

providing schools, for instance.¹²⁶ There was also a request to the Postmaster General for telephone kiosks to be placed around the estate.¹²⁷ Indeed, if the estate did not need finishing off, then aspects of it needed to be improved. Better postal and Underground services were requested. Hendon Urban District Council was notified about bad roads and poor street lighting on the estate.¹²⁸ It was also asked to set up a day nursery.¹²⁹ Middlesex County Council was approached about the possibility of a speed limit on the estate, and the estate Superintendent, Mr. Richardson, was approached about the dumping of rubbish in one of the estate streets and the enclosure of gardens in another.¹³⁰ The L.C.C. were also asked to prohibit street cries and hawking on Sundays as it “does not tend to improve the status of the neighbourhood.”¹³¹

To depict the W.R.A. as a militant body in light of such activities is clearly inappropriate. Not merely were the representations of the Association made on perfectly reasonable issues, but as Mackay stressed at the Association’s initial meeting the aim of the W.R.A. was not to be antagonistic in this area of its work, but co-operative. Or, as Ingram had put it, they wished ‘to live a quiet, peaceful, pleasant life on the Estate without being continually at war with other bodies.’ Moreover, such action by the W.R.A. was, as I have stressed, a minor part of its agenda. As ‘The Rover’, the columnist of the *Hendon and Finchley Times*, observed, the Association:

“Was formed at the outset, in December, 1927, with the idea of providing social events and assisting in the development of the estate.”¹³²

The W.R.A. did have working-class members, it did not, however, wish to pursue a working-class political agenda.

¹²⁵ *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 72.

¹²⁶ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 10.

¹²⁷ *The Watling Resident* 1 (11) (March 1929), 260.

¹²⁸ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 10.

¹²⁹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (8) (December 1928), 185.

¹³⁰ *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 77.

¹³¹ Letter from F.E. Bennett to W.J. Berry, 4.2.28. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹³² *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 21.6.29., 13.

(ii) Failing To Promote The Tenants' Interests.

For at least some of the Watling residents, however, this limiting of the scope of the Association was not sufficient. They wished to have a body devoted to more fighting and campaigning, an organisation that promoted their interests rather than their good fellowship. Indeed, this occurred despite the claim of the W.R.A. that numerous tenants' grievances had been placed before the estate Superintendent and, in most cases, promptly remedied.¹³³ In particular, as on Roehampton, a major concern of some Watling residents - as Ingram's letters to the *Resident* suggest - was the hardship they experienced in paying the levels of rent charged by the L.C.C. Yet, as I have explained, such issues were considered by the W.R.A.'s founders to be beyond the scope of the Association. In strong contrast to Roehampton, however, the desire for lower rents on Watling, together with the alleviation of distress that high rents caused, resulted in continuous attempts to transform the W.R.A. into a more antagonistic body, an organisation that would pursue working-class objectives. This was a power struggle within the Association in which the estate's Communists, although by no means involving them alone, were prominent. The transformation, however, of the W.R.A. was resisted, mostly successfully, by its founding members and the characterisation of it as a militant body with a working-class agenda must still be judged inappropriate.

The divergence of opinion, and a precursor of the conflicts to follow, over the purpose of the W.R.A. became apparent at its very outset at the meeting called in January 1928 to form the Association. Once Mackay had outlined his suggestions for the aims of the Association, it was immediately suggested from Mr. Hayward, in the audience, that the organisation should be known as the "Watling Tenants' Protection League," and Mr. Gaiger - a Labour Councillor in Finsbury as well as a Watling resident - developed the point.¹³⁴ What was needed, he argued, was a "real fighting tenants' league," since the estate, as both the letter from 'Adsum' and the attitude of the Urban District Council bore witness, was "a little colony surrounded

¹³³ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 10.

¹³⁴ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 18.1.28., 10; & 10.2.28, 9.

by enemy states.” In response, Copinger insisted that this was not the case. He also pointed out that if they were to become a tenants’ league, then he could not participate for he was not a tenant. Then, for good measure, he added:

“For God’s sake don’t start having war on this estate but let us approach people in the right manner.”

With this Hayward and Gaiger’s suggestion was abandoned, and the title ‘Residents’ Association’ was “adopted by an overwhelming majority.”¹³⁵ It was further agreed that the convenors of the meeting be elected as the Association’s Executive Committee and, moreover, that the Association “should be strictly non-political and non-sectarian.”¹³⁶

If the founders of the W.R.A. believed that the direction of the Association was now settled, their blissful anticipation of concerts and whist drives during the winter evenings was to be disturbed the following month at a second public meeting held to approve the Association’s rules.¹³⁷ The strength of feeling over the levels of rent charged was soon displayed. The W.R.A. Secretary, Bennet, began to outline work that was being considered by the Committee only to be interrupted by “cries of ‘What about the rents?’” Although the Chairman, Mackay, attempted to deflect attention away from the subject, commenting that everyone had known the level of rents before moving to Watling, the issue dominated the rest of the meeting. Mr. Pearson, for instance, a bricklayer who had recently been out of work, called upon the Committee to meet with the L.C.C. and stress the “urgent need for a general reduction.” Mr. C. Cope, who had just been elected as one of the Association’s trustees, supported this:

“The question of rents, he said, should be the chief plank in the platform of the Association.”

Mr. R.H. Edwards, the other recently elected trustee, lent his weight to the argument too, arguing that “they had to build up a fighting organisation; one with a kick.”

¹³⁵ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 18.1.28., 10.

¹³⁶ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 9.

¹³⁷ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 9.

The meeting adopted Pearson's suggestion "unanimously."¹³⁸ Further, the rules of the Association suggested by Mackay at the previous meeting were significantly changed. The objects of the W.R.A. were now set down as:

"(a) Promotion of the interests of the residents on the estate, and (b) for their well-being in such social and other activities as may be found necessary."¹³⁹

Although the rules as they were written down had changed, as far as the founders of the Association were concerned, however, their original objectives remained intact. For instance, in line with Pearson's suggestion, the W.R.A. did meet with the L.C.C., and, as part of an agenda including the need for a meeting place, the possibility of a rent reduction was raised. The Council's response was to arrange for a second meeting at which the Association could detail its case.¹⁴⁰ It was at this second meeting in April 1928 that the Executive Committee of the W.R.A. showed its true feelings on the matter. Bennet, for instance, was at pains to point out to the L.C.C. representatives that his Association had been "formed to be a non-political organisation." True, he noted that there had been a number of evictions in the last twelve months, yet his perspective was that such events lowered "the status of the Estate." Further, he wished to know "how such poor people were accepted," for, "putting slum people there is bad for people who can pay the rent."¹⁴¹

Outside the circle of founding members on the W.R.A.'s Executive Committee, however, discontent among tenants remained. This was discontent with both the high rents they were charged and the Association's lack of real action to ameliorate the problem. If anything, it grew. By May, for instance, certain tenants of flats whose rates had just increased were reported to be contemplating a rent strike. The Committee condemned such an action as "both foolish and futile." The proper course of action, it was argued, was to "lay a considered case before the

¹³⁸ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 17.2.28., 8.

¹³⁹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 9.

¹⁴⁰ Notes from a meeting between Copinger, Cope, Pearson, and Edwards of the W.R.A. and the Valuer and Mr. W.J. Berry, 16.2.28. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹⁴¹ Rough Notes of proceedings of Conference between representatives of the L.C.C. and representatives of the W.R.A., 18.4.28. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1 27.

Council.”¹⁴² The result, however, was far from immediately rewarding; “we fear you will have to contemplate a slight half-yearly increase in your rent.”¹⁴³

The pleas of ‘Good Fellowship’ in the *Resident* meanwhile were rebuked by several subsequent writers explaining why rent should be a central concern of the Association. In June 1928 F.T. Howard argued that a large number of residents were struggling under the burden of rent “simply to give the children a healthy chance in life.” As such:

“The economic circumstances of many on the estate causes the rent to be of chief interest to the Residents, therefore. ... don’t let us confine our activities to the nice things of life, but include also the hard ones, one of which is *Rent*.”¹⁴⁴

A month later, Pearson wrote in somewhat stronger terms, denouncing those who:

“Would turn the Association into a mutual admiration society, whose main objects, would be to share the butterfly of pleasure.”

Rent was a “sore burden,” he argued, yet if the Association was to tackle it, fight it and overcome it, then it would “grow into a vigorous body.”¹⁴⁵

J. Capp, who had presided the previous month over a meeting of the Watling Estate branch of the Communist Party, at which lower rents were the issue, similarly chose to condemn ‘Good Fellowship’s’ ideal for the W.R.A., an ideal which he had interpreted “according to the confines of his own narrow minded mentality.”¹⁴⁶

“The great majority of members (as indicated at the last quarterly meeting) are strongly in favour of giving organised expression, through the medium of the Association, for a general reduction in rents. This is due to the fact that the Association, in the main, is composed of members whose chief concern is the hard struggle for the necessities of life, namely food, clothing and shelter.

...

‘Good Fellowship’ will soon realise that empty sympathy and appeals for silence will not solve the high rent problem, the only solution to which is a general reduction in rents.

¹⁴² *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 18.

¹⁴³ *The Watling Resident* 1 (2) (June 1928), 23-5.

¹⁴⁴ *The Watling Resident* 1 (2) (June 1928), 36.

¹⁴⁵ *The Watling Resident* 1 (3) (July 1928), 59-60.

¹⁴⁶ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 15.6.28., 9; and *The Watling Resident* 1 (3) (July 1928), 57.

As a means to this end it is urgently necessary to build up a strong well-organised, fighting Residents' Association."¹⁴⁷

In contrast to 'Good Fellowship', Capp described himself as "a class conscious worker standing for 100 per cent. working-class policy within the Association."¹⁴⁸

Such internal strife within the W.R.A. was not restricted solely to attempting to get it to campaign more forcefully on the question of rents, however. Both Capp and Pearson spearheaded a plan to have twenty-five per cent. of the Association's funds earmarked for the relief of distress on the estate. This was first proposed at a General Meeting of the Association in May 1928. Although the proposal was lost, Capp and Pearson were successful in having a Sub-Committee established to investigate the amount of distress on the estate. Moreover, in addition to Mrs. Lee, they were appointed to it.¹⁴⁹ In August, they gave their provisional report:

"There is a constant recurrence of genuine cases of distress. ... the Sub-Committee is strongly convinced of the need for the establishment of a special Distress fund, comprising at least *twenty-five per cent. of the general funds of the Association.*"¹⁵⁰

Before this could be acted upon, however, and after the local Communist Party had issued a circular urging residents to join the Association, the Chairman of the W.R.A., Mackay, issued a "Warning to our Members" in the pages of the *Resident*. His fears centred on an attempted take-over of the Association by the Communists on the estate:

"Many meetings have been held and the business of the Association discussed outside and a definite line of action laid down for the taking over of the Association."¹⁵¹

When Mackay had been ill and absent from the Association Pearson been elected to the Committee and then had asked for him to be replaced.¹⁵² The purpose of the Communists, Mackay argued, was to use the W.R.A. for "all kinds of purposes other

¹⁴⁷ *The Watling Resident* 1 (3) (July 1928), 57.

¹⁴⁸ *The Watling Resident* 1 (5) (September 1928), 107.

¹⁴⁹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 15.

¹⁵⁰ *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 77. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵¹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 74.

¹⁵² *The Watling Resident* 1 (5) (September 1928), 114.

than the objects” for which it had been formed. As regards their plans for a Distress Fund in particular, he was “strongly opposed ... as the proper thing to do is to see that the responsible authority do not escape their obligation.”¹⁵³

At the next General Meeting Capp and Pearson responded. Pearson, for instance, drew attention to cases of illness and unemployment amongst the residents, “where the children and others are suffering.” “It behoves this Association,” he stressed, “to assist those who unfortunately are not able to assist themselves.”¹⁵⁴

Capp, on the other hand, emphasised that:

“If we have an Association it is for the purposes of mutual aid. It should be up to the whole of the Association to see to it that members of the Association help those who are in difficulties.”

Mackay’s warning, however, appeared effective. When it was moved that a Distress Fund be established it was “defeated by overwhelming majority.” So too was the suggestion by Capp and Pearson for a vote of censure against Mackay for his article in the *Resident*.¹⁵⁵

With this victory for the founders of the Association, and Mackay especially, the conflict over the aims of the W.R.A. essentially subsided. True, the Editorial board of the *Resident* did still favour the idea of a distress fund. With rising sales, of up to three thousand copies, the journal was, by April 1929, making a substantial profit and it was proposed to distribute this amongst the residents. When the Association Executive refused to allow this, the only option of protest available to the editor, advertising manager and circulation manager was to resign.¹⁵⁶ By this time, however, the W.R.A. had been firmly re-established along the lines that had been originally intended, not that it had ever really moved that far from them anyway. Certainly, the Executive Committee did not see themselves at war with the L.C.C. or any other official body. By November 1928, for instance, a fighting side was most definitely not in evidence. One of the final wishes of Capp and Pearson

¹⁵³ *The Watling Resident* 1 (4) (August 1928), 74.

¹⁵⁴ *The Watling Resident* 1 (5) (September 1928), 97.

¹⁵⁵ *The Watling Resident* 1 (5) (September 1928), 114.

¹⁵⁶ E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, *Watling Community Association*, 46.

had been a request to the L.C.C. for the acceptance of part-payment of rent arrears. When the Council wrote to the Association and refused this, the W.R.A. displayed its most co-operative and non-antagonistic character. Rev. Copinger, for instance, said "he thought the letter seemed extremely kind and polite and hoped it would be acknowledged in such a way as it deserved."¹⁵⁷ By February 1929 neither Pearson nor Capp remained as Association Committee members.¹⁵⁸

(iii) Conclusion.

The case of the Watling Residents' Association further contradicts the Yeos' view of such bodies as militant and mutualist. The Association certainly had members with working-class values. Its Chairman, for instance, was also the Chairman of the local Labour Party. Yet, the W.R.A. had never been established with political aims in mind, and nor did it choose to adopt any. It was certainly not an organisation formed for the purpose of promoting specifically working-class interests, militant or otherwise.

The prime concern of the Association, I have argued, was the encouragement of the estate's social life, an activity which was seen to lead to 'good fellowship' amongst the tenants. An important aspect of the W.R.A.'s efforts in this direction was the attempt to provide a club house on Watling. In contrast to the efforts of the R.E.T.A. on Roehampton, however, this was never achieved, mainly because the L.C.C. would not consider entrusting the Watling residents with a drinks license. Although the promotion of 'good fellowship' was the Association's main purpose, however, as with the R.E.T.A., representations were still made to various official bodies about matters that arose on the estate. At no time though was there a militant edge to such representations, for the W.R.A. was intended to be a body that did not antagonise, but co-operated over issues such as poor street lighting and street cries on Sundays.

¹⁵⁷ *The Watling Resident* 1 (7) (November 1928), 144.

¹⁵⁸ *The Watling Resident* 1 (10) (February 1929), 230.

For some of the residents, however, I have stressed that this was not their idea of what a residents' association should be doing. A more fighting body was called for. As on Roehampton, the issue of rents was clearly of concern to Watling residents, and there were calls for the W.R.A. to take up the matter, to fight for the tenants and to promote their interests rather than their good fellowship. In strong contrast to Roehampton though, where admittedly the Central Committee needed to be pushed, the founding members of the W.R.A. chose not to do this. Such action they maintained was not the purpose or object of the Association. To inform the L.C.C. that putting slum dwellers on the estate was bad for people who could afford the rent was hardly the same as asking for a rent reduction.

With such differences of opinion as to the W.R.A.'s purpose, therefore, there were repeated struggles over the direction it should take. The communist influence on Watling, in particular, strove for a more fighting body. They were standing for a fully working-class policy within the Association. This, however, was resisted by the founders of the Association and the activities of the W.R.A. remained non-political. The W.R.A. did not have any working-class aims in this sense, and it was certainly not militant.

From the previous two sections of this chapter, then, it is evident that there are both similarities and differences between these two tenants' organisations and their histories. In terms of similarities, both the R.E.T.A. and the W.R.A. developed a broad base of aims and activities on which to appeal to the estates' residents. Although they both avoided an antagonistic relationship with the L.C.C., the organisations did concern themselves with the infrastructural needs of the estates. Further, they were primarily concerned with attempting to build strong social bonds between the tenants across the estate through their social activities. In these respects, therefore, both the R.E.T.A. and the W.R.A. can be seen as trying to create a broad association between the tenants, a collective sense of themselves that was based primarily on co-residence as opposed to class. In the case of Roehampton this was pursued through a set of ideas which imagined this council estate as a 'village', and sought to inculcate a spirit of closeness, co-operation and equality through sport,

gardening and social events. On Watling this was pursued through the idea of 'good fellowship'. Again this was to be forged by social events, sport and the sharing of garden tools. It was also to create a set of common bonds based on co-operation and equality between residents rather than on shared struggle and mutual assistance between workers.

In terms of differences between the Associations, it was clearly the case that the members of the R.E.T.A., or at least those who were in control of it, drawn either from the middle class or the labour aristocracy, saw it as part of their responsibility to attempt to 'uplift' the estate's tenants through education. Here the vision of the estate as a Garden Suburb and the desire for 'village life' was not simply a matter of improved environment and close common bonds. These ideas were part of a moral project of improvement which depended upon the reformist ethos of the Garden City movement and the idealised social relations of the English village. On Watling, however, there was never any allusion to a Garden Suburb ideal, nor was there any effort in the direction of organising uplifting and educational activities for the tenants. Although it was noted in the first issue of the Association's journal, *The Watling Resident*, under the column heading of 'Educational', that "we hope to insert Instructive Articles as space permits," they never did.¹⁵⁹

A feature that was characteristic of the W.R.A., however, was the political battle that occurred over the aims of the Association: 'good fellowship' through light-hearted recreation as opposed to the mutuality and agitation of the Communists. Both of these were plausible aims for the Association, for Watling's more working-class tenants were more likely to be affected by the relatively high rents of L.C.C. houses than many on Roehampton. There was, however, a differentiation in the way politics and class came together in the Association. Conflict within the W.R.A. arose because some of the members wanted to use it for directly political ends, whilst those that formed it, although political elsewhere, did not.

¹⁵⁹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 10.

Although both Associations did resemble each other to some extent, therefore, they had come to do so by following very different paths. Their similarities had arisen from very different histories shaped by the different local contexts within which they were formed and through which they operated. In the next section of this chapter, I want to discuss the ways in which these different histories shaped their notions of community.

D. Tenants' Associations And Community.

I begin by focusing on Roehampton. The R.E.T.A., I argue, held two particular conceptualizations of community. First, the Association argued that the residents of the estate were middle-class and used to a life of suburban insularity. This, however, was not seen as desirable and the R.E.T.A., therefore, would encourage and develop a feeling of friendship and comradeship amongst the tenants. It would *make* a sense of community for them by means of its activities; a sense of community, I argue, intimately connected with the Association's notions of the estate as a Garden Suburb with a 'village spirit'. Second, the Association also used a particularly legitimating construction of community, that of the Roehampton estate as a community for which it was working. In so doing, the emotive power of the ideal of community, I argue, both discredited actions the R.E.T.A. disagreed with, whilst, more frequently, legitimating its own activities and aims.

It is stressed, however, that this conceptualizing of community by the R.E.T.A. poses a few problems. First, the R.E.T.A.'s ideals of community had a notably patriarchal nature. Women were under-represented within the Association and had few activities arranged for them unconnected to their assumed duties within the home. Second, it was rare for much importance to be attributed to the R.E.T.A.'s influence on the estate. Admittedly, the Garden Society was frequently held in high regard, perhaps unsurprisingly in view of the encouragement given to gardening by the L.C.C. Its 'parent' body - the R.E.T.A. - was, however, not usually seen as a centre of community life in view of, first, the tendency of the Roehampton residents,

discussed in the last chapter, to adopt a privatised, home and family-centred lifestyle and, second, the drinking aspect of the Association, which frequently alienated other residents.

My attention is then focused upon Watling. In contrast to the claims of the Yeos that working-class organisations can be reluctant to use the term ‘community’ in view of its middle-class embrace and corruption, the W.R.A., I argue, although not claiming to be representative of community interests in the same manner as the R.E.T.A., did still envisage itself as creative of community. As I have noted in the previous chapter, some of the Watling residents believed that when they first moved to the estate there was a lack of community, particularly because of the distancing of former friends and neighbours together with the absence of any social activity on the estate. The W.R.A. believed this too and sought to make community for the residents by encouraging them to associate through its various activities, especially its social ones. It is stressed, however, that the Association was doing this not merely because there was a lack of community, but because the residents themselves were viewed as unable to create one. Although there was no suggestion that they were inhibited in their social life by middle-class values associated with respectability and insularity, they were still seen as needing to be assisted to be more sociable. Again, therefore, this was a version of community made for the people, not amongst them.

It is further emphasised that, as with the R.E.T.A., there are problems with the Association’s community ideal. First, although the point is not laboured, the suggestion that Watling’s residents needed help in their sociability is disputed in view of the arguments I have put forward in the previous chapter. The residents, I reiterate, had proved adept at creating their own community through their gregarious nature and extensive public sociability. Second, as with the R.E.T.A. once more, the W.R.A. was a notably patriarchal body. Women were under-represented within it and viewed as happy with their domestic tasks. Third, and again in line with the R.E.T.A., the W.R.A. was not particularly influential on the estate, most especially

when sub-sections disaffiliated from it and other groups, also pursuing social aims (amongst others), began to develop and offer alternative attractions.

(i) R.E.T.A.: Creating And Working For The Community.

A particular aim of the R.E.T.A.'s activities, and certainly predominant once it had acquired Putney Park House, was to promote a community spirit amongst the estate's tenants. Prior to moving to the estate, the middle-class residents of Roehampton, the R.E.T.A. argued, had lived a life of unruffled suburban placidity, a life of privatised isolation. The R.E.T.A.'s purpose, however, was to prevent this re-occurring on the estate. Through Putney Park House and its activities, the Association believed it could encourage and develop camaraderie and friendliness amongst the tenants, and thus promote a community spirit. The R.E.T.A. would make community for the people of Roehampton.

A few months after the R.E.T.A.'s Club and Institute had started its activities, the Association took the opportunity at a meeting of the Literary and Debating Society to detail what the work and purpose of the scheme would be. The audience, and later the readers of the *Gazette*, were informed that a substantial part of their effort would be to encourage and develop a community spirit amongst the middle-class residents on the estate. Before the war, it was argued, the aloofness and "insularity of the Englishman [*sic*] was proverbial," and no more so than "in the local atmosphere surrounding, for want of a better term, middle-class people."

"It was a fact - often a boasted fact - that families could live side by side for years without even knowing each other, much less caring about matters of mutual concern. And even if people living in the same street did in process of time scrape nodding acquaintanceship, it was certainly unheard of for people living in adjacent streets to know, or care, much about each other."

The war, however, had apparently effected a radical change in people's outlook on life. The barriers of reserve among individuals and classes had come down for there was no purpose to be served by artificiality. There was a general spirit of camaraderie and "we became, for the first time perhaps, natural beings."

Although when hostilities ceased there was soon a “tendency for ordinary suburbia to revert to snobbish respectability,” this was not possible on Roehampton, it was argued, in spite of the residents being “people who had been forcibly severed from the genteel respectability of villadom.” Rather “scope was provided for encouragement and development of the changed social outlook.” It was argued that the estate had been commenced “when the new spirit was in the ascendant” and, moreover, with the tenants all housed under the same landlord there was “no room for finely graded social distinctions so beloved of pre-war suburbia.” The Association, it was argued, had arisen as a “medium whereby the new spirit of friendliness could find expression.” “Human progress,” it was maintained, could “only be maintained by co-operation, collective effort and mutual trust.” As such, the R.E.T.A.’s efforts - their social, sporting, gardening and educational activities - were to be “directed towards development of the social side of life and to the furtherance of schemes giving expression to the communal spirit.”¹⁶⁰ Behind the amateur dramatics, literary debates, games of tennis, and flower shows lay a social theory of community, therefore. One that was not made “amongst the people” as expressed by the residents in the previous chapter, but one that the Association had to encourage and develop.

Suburban anomie, however, was not all that would be vanquished within the R.E.T.A.’s community, for also inherent within their social community was the R.E.T.A.’s desire to make of Roehampton a Garden Suburb with a village feel, complete with ‘uplifted’ residents. These were the recurrent themes of the Association. This, I suggest, gave the community, not merely respectable, but moral virtues. The uplifting role of education requires little comment, it was made explicit by the R.E.T.A., and could only lead to increased respectability and moral improvement. It was described as ‘uplift’. The ideal of life in the Garden Suburb, meanwhile, carried with it, as was shown in Chapter One and previously in this chapter, the notion of liberation from the physical, social, and moral evils associated with the industrial city and the teeming metropolis. If the old cities were perceived

¹⁶⁰ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (11) (October 1924), 13-5.

as vast, frightening, uncontrollable and unnatural phenomena, then the Roehampton estate - 'the most charming Garden Suburb of London' - was the antithesis of such turmoil in the modern world. It was a fitting environment for humanity in contrast to the narrow streets, decrepit buildings and overcrowded tenements of urban and industrial centres where only a self-seeking order of inhumanity could possibly survive. This was a moral heaven as opposed to a decadent hell. More than this, however, the ideal of the village was the ideal of England, a green and pleasant land. The desire for the village spirit represented the desire to discard burdens of 'progress' and return to a simple life inherent in the idea of rural England. The fêtes, gardening shows and sporting activities of the R.E.T.A., therefore, had perhaps more meaning than mere social events - they were a display of Englishness. They were also a display of respectability, decency, and morality. In the community of Roehampton, residents would sit outside Putney Park House with a warm beer in the evening sunshine and listen, if not to the sound of leather on willow (for they had no cricket ground), then at least racket against ball. The R.E.T.A.'s community would be rural, harmonious and civilised. There would be friendliness, unity and justice. It was respectable, decent, and moral. This, it was suggested, was an ideal of community that the residents should participate in, for the R.E.T.A. had wrapped itself and its activities in an especially warm and emotive language of community: one that was associated with 'natural beings' and 'human progress'.

If this suggests that the R.E.T.A. was aware of the use of the emotive power of the term 'community', then the Association's second conceptualization, and their use of it, lends far more weight to the argument. In addition to arguing that it sought to encourage and develop community amongst the residents, it also conceptualized the estate as a community for which it was working. This was an action which could only legitimize its activities. When it campaigned to the London County Council and the Wandsworth Borough Council on issues it felt to be of sufficient importance, for instance, the Association presented itself as either of benefit to the community or as acting on behalf of the community interest. On other occasions, when its activities were questioned, the R.E.T.A. attempted to discredit

the doubters by portraying them as alien to the the very nature of the community in which they lived.

A recurrent theme presented to the tenants of Roehampton through the medium of the *Gazette* was the idea that the R.E.T.A. was representative of the whole estate. In January 1923, for instance, it was announced that no matter what phase of activity was undertaken by the Association, it would “be planned from the standpoint of providing the greatest good for the greatest number.”¹⁶¹ A few months later it was similarly proclaimed that:

“It seems certain that there is no resident whose interest in one direction or another is not bound up with the work of the Association.”¹⁶²

To stress this point, however, in order to fully legitimize and prioritise its activities on the estate, the Association positioned itself not just as representative of the estate as a whole, but also as working for the benefit of the community that was the estate. The *Gazette*, for instance, described the workers of the Association as “well proven friends of our community.”¹⁶³

An example of this came in 1926 when St. Margaret’s Church was in negotiations with the Council to build a parish hall on the estate.¹⁶⁴ When sketchy details of this reached the Central Committee of the R.E.T.A., suggesting a social hall was to be built on the estate as an alternative attraction to their own activities at Putney Park House, their reaction was to deplore the scheme. The Association viewed the L.C.C.’s actions as “tantamount to the setting up of another organisation”, and thus threatening their very future, for:

“It is obvious that a counter-attraction of this sort will naturally cause a division amongst the tenants on the Estate.”

¹⁶¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 15.

¹⁶² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), 11-5.

¹⁶³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 11 (11) (November 1932), 1-2.

¹⁶⁴ Memorandum from F. Hunt to the Chairman of the Housing Committee, 29.4.26. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1 26.

In an attempt to prevent the hall being built, or better still to have a hall built for them, the R.E.T.A. tried to convince the L.C.C., for several years, that the administration of any hall on the estate should be within their province.¹⁶⁵

One aspect of this was to argue that despite having acquired Putney Park House the property was not large enough to cater for the number of residents who came to enjoy the various attractions that were staged there. Whist drives, dances and concerts, the L.C.C. were informed, were either still held in Roehampton Parish Hall or in overcrowded rooms in the Association's headquarters, with members often being refused admission due to lack of room. In addition, juvenile and educational activities had also been curtailed due to lack of accommodation.¹⁶⁶ As H. Sheasby explained to the L.C.C. Valuer, the R.E.T.A.'s plan for a hall was:

"To provide accommodation entirely separated from Putney Park House, where the social and educative work of the Association could be further developed and extended."¹⁶⁷

Much more than this, however, it was emphasised to the L.C.C. that the administration of any hall should be the Association's legitimate responsibility, not just because they needed the accommodation for their activities, but because their activities extended further and were more popular than those of any other organisation in the neighbourhood. In presenting this case, however, the R.E.T.A. did not argue solely that it was representative of the estate, but rather that the estate was a community to which the Association was of benefit. As, for instance, the R.E.T.A. Chairman explained to the Clerk of the L.C.C.:

"The legitimate sphere of action of the Association entitles the Officers and Committee to control a Hall on the Estate for the purpose of housing meetings, various entertainments, etc., for the benefit of the very large membership and the general Community. No other body on or off the Estate, possesses so strong a claim to exercise such control. It would appear

¹⁶⁵ Letter from W.G. Quantrell (R.E.T.A. Chairman) to C.B. Levita, 13.4.26. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/26.

¹⁶⁶ Letter from W.G. Quantrell to C.B. Levita, 13.4.26. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26. *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 7 (12) (December 1928), 14.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from H. Sheasby to F. Hunt, 23.11.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/26.

in fact, that the aims, purposes and standing of the Association make it a peculiar prerogative.”¹⁶⁸

This construction of the estate as a community was also evident in other areas of the Association’s campaigning work when it sought to justify its activities. The strength of feeling aroused in the Association in the early 1920s when the Wandsworth Borough Council was refusing to accept responsibility for cleaning the roads on the estate has already been described above. With public safety considered at risk, the state of affairs was described as a “disgrace”, and the Central Committee were determined to see “full and proper service” given by the Council.¹⁶⁹ So much so, that in protest a Committee member was summoned to the County Court for not paying a proportion of his rates, and the R.E.T.A. suggested that other tenants should perhaps follow his example. At the hearing, however, it was notable that the Justices, although ordering payment of the full rates and failing to support Mr. Thompson’s actions and the stance of the Association on the matter, did express their sympathy with the conditions faced by the tenants. Especially, no doubt, as it was stressed to them that “the health of the community was being endangered.”¹⁷⁰

In a slightly different manner, this particular legitimating construct of the Roehampton community was also used by the R.E.T.A. to discredit, and discourage, any dissension among the tenants about the value of the activities organised for them. As the Yeos note, actions against the interest of the community can be made to appear “separate, antagonistic, sectional and selfish.”¹⁷¹ In July 1923, for instance, the full weight of the emotive power of the ideal of community was brought to bear upon an individual who had seen fit to cross the Association’s path by writing ‘why?’ on an advert for the annual festival and sports day. To bring the culprit’s action into disrepute, to show it as aberrant within the morally civilised and respectable way of life of the estate, the *Gazette* Editorial commented:

¹⁶⁸ Letter from W.G. Quanttrill to the Clerk of the L.C.C., 1.6.26. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

¹⁶⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 3-4.

¹⁷⁰ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (4) (February 1923), 19.

¹⁷¹ E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the Uses of “Community”’, 246.

“It is not surprising, perhaps, among such a large community, to find such a mean-spirited person.”¹⁷²

In all these ways the R.E.T.A. attempted to use the idea of community to explain, promote and legitimise its actions. It presented itself as both the basis of communal life, its expression, and its legitimate advocate.

(ii) R.E.T.A.: A Patriarchal Drinking Place.

The claim of the R.E.T.A. that it was both creative and representative of community is questionable on two fronts, however. First, the Association's ideals of community appear highly patriarchal since the notions of 'co-operation and collective effort' which guided its work did not extend to any egalitarian form of gender relations. One aspect of this was that women were under-represented in both the general membership and that of the Central Committee. Perhaps worse, however, the role within the R.E.T.A. for those who did become members was usually to perform any 'domestic' tasks or 'housework' that needed to be done there. Second, whether the R.E.T.A. was either of benefit to the community of Roehampton or creative of their ideal of community was far from universally accepted. Certainly, amongst the residents that I spoke to, a few who had been members of the Association argued that it had been. The Association's levels of support and membership had, however, never encompassed the whole estate, and the majority of people that I spoke to denied that it had played an important part in the life of the estate. Admittedly, much importance was frequently attributed to the activities of the Garden Society on the estate, perhaps unsurprisingly in view of the encouragement given to gardening by the L.C.C. The Association as a whole and its headquarters at Putney Park House, however, were rarely seen as a centre of community life. This was not simply due to the tendency of the Roehampton residents to adopt a privatised, home and family-centred lifestyle, but to the alienating effect of the Association's reputation as a (male) drinking club.

¹⁷² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (9) (July 1923), 3.

Despite the Association's first Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Songhurst, being a woman, and also an early claim within the *Gazette* to be "particularly anxious to give publicity to the women's point of view," it needs to be stressed that if the R.E.T.A. truly believed that it was creative of community, then its ideal of community was particularly patriarchal.¹⁷³ At one level, women were under-represented within the Association, both as Committee and general members. In 1923, for instance, both the Gazette Committee and the Club and Institute Committee were all men.¹⁷⁴ The Central Committee of fourteen members contained only three women.¹⁷⁵ The following year their numbers had declined to zero.¹⁷⁶ Admittedly, the general membership figures were somewhat better, though not by much. In 1930, for instance, of the total R.E.T.A. membership of 682, 191 were women.¹⁷⁷

Beyond this, however, it was also clearly the R.E.T.A.'s view that in catering for the needs and interests of the estate women, the only needs and interests that needed to be catered for were the household arts. Although, for instance, the *Gazette* devoted space for women's interests on the "Ladies' Page", its contents assumed that the women's affairs and interests were limited to recipes for fish cakes and instructions on how to make and use floor stain.¹⁷⁸ Somewhat more telling of the same attitude was that the Ladies' Committee of the Association had only been formed because, after the 'house warmings', the Association "realised that the provision of suitable refreshments would be conducive to the success of future social events."¹⁷⁹ Similarly, when another Committee was appointed to develop activities for women in Putney Park House:

¹⁷³ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (7) (May 1923), 3.

¹⁷⁴ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (7) (May 1923), 7.

¹⁷⁵ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (4) (March 1924), 9.

¹⁷⁶ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (5) (April 1924), 13.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from H. Sheasby to F. Hunt, 14.2.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

¹⁷⁸ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 32. For a debate of the 'Ladies' Page' see D. Spender, *There's Always Been a Women's Movement This Century* (London, 1983), 128-33.

¹⁷⁹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* (3) (January 1923), 11.

“It was agreed that teas were needed at the Club and Institute on Saturdays and Sundays, and arrangements were at once made to commence this activity.”¹⁸⁰

The women of the Association were to do its housework, therefore, and even when any alternative activities were arranged, they too were still intimately connected to the domestic sphere. The “Ladies’ Room” at the Club, for instance, was provided with a sewing machine and a sewing circle was formed.¹⁸¹ When the Association began its evening classes, dressmaking was the course given priority by the Ladies’ Committee.¹⁸²

Besides pointing out the problematic patriarchal nature of the R.E.T.A. and its activities in relation to the community it supposedly created and represented, it also needs to be stressed, however, that few people, at least among those that I spoke to, attributed much importance to the Association in general. Admittedly, the Garden Society was popular:

“One set up that has helped to keep the feeling of belonging is the Roehampton Garden Society. ... it has always held people together very much.”¹⁸³

“The Garden Society was very flourishing up to the war ... they did a damn good job. ... the Garden Society did an extremely good job in as much as it brought together the people who were doing gardening.”¹⁸⁴

If gardening was an important feature of estate life, however, this was not due solely to the work of the Society for, at the same time, the L.C.C. was “of the opinion that the encouragement of garden cultivation amongst the tenants is productive of much good,” and they sought to promote it.¹⁸⁵ The tenants’ handbook, for instance, gave basic gardening advice, while the prizes awarded by the Garden Society were

¹⁸⁰ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (8) (July 1924), 19.

¹⁸¹ *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (8) (July 1924), 18.

¹⁸² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 2 (13) (December 1924), 5.

¹⁸³ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Mr. Barnes.

¹⁸⁵ Report of the Housing Committee, 19.2.29., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1929* (London 1929), 265-6.

subsidised by the Council to make them more attractive.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, it was made a condition of tenancy that at the very least the front gardens should be kept in a neat and cultivated condition.¹⁸⁷ This was vividly remembered by the tenants:

“If you didn’t look after your front garden, you got a notice about it to say ‘look after your garden or move’.”¹⁸⁸

“In those days if your garden was not up to scratch, the superintendent in his bowler hat, with a black coat, striped trousers, the umbrella - the treatment - would knock on your door and give you a fortnight to put it right. If not, goodbye.”¹⁸⁹

Of the Garden Society’s ‘parent’ body, however, praise and support for its activities was extremely limited, although it did occur. Mr. Hibbert was one interviewee able to enthusiastically recall some its activities:

“In fact I joined the rowing section of it. R.E.T.A. That was the main centre for all activities. I used to go downstairs there before the war to the scouts, underneath in a rather damp basement. Certain people hired it out for weddings, there was a bar there, there was a club. Quite a centre of activities.”¹⁹⁰

Leslie Parsons was also very forthcoming in praise of it. Putney Park House was, he argued, “a very important centre for sociability for the people moving here.” For, in view of the sports clubs organised from there and the activities of the Dramatic Society and Musical Society, “there were so many things going on there that it was the main centre of everything.”

“I mean I can remember, my sister to give you an example. My eldest sister had her wedding breakfast there. She was married in St. Margaret’s Church, and then we all went back there and it was beautiful. ... And of course it created a nice atmosphere; a lot of the people there of course were relatives, but a lot of them were also members of the Club, because they were a part of the community - the football teams, the cricket teams, the table tennis, and all the rest of it you know.”

Moreover:

¹⁸⁶ L.C.C., *Becontree Tenants’ Handbook*, 19-20. F. Hunt, *Housing Estates: Statistics For The Year 1931-32* (London, 1932), 3.

¹⁸⁷ M.H. Cox, *Housing: With Particular Reference to Post-War Housing Schemes* (London, 1928), 165.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Mrs. Murphy.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Mr. Barnes.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Mr. Hibbert.

“One of the aspects of living here that was so nice was that there were garden fêtes and there were annual competitions for all the various arts - jam making, cake making. Rather like village life in a way.”

Life on Roehampton, he told me, “was a new way of life” for the residents, compared to places like Westminster, Fulham and Battersea.¹⁹¹

Such views of the R.E.T.A. were, however, exceptional. Although the Association itself also argued that, for instance, “obviously apparent is the popularity of the Sunday evening concerts,” that the football club was “flourishing” and that the Quixotic Players played to a full house, its membership in fact never amounted to more than a small proportion of the estate’s total population of over five thousand people.¹⁹² In 1930, a few years after Roehampton had finally been completed and the estate population reached its maximum level, the Association membership was 682. Nearly eight years later in December 1937, when the R.E.T.A.’s activities were perceived by the L.C.C. as nothing much more than selling drinks, the membership had fallen to 190.¹⁹³ As Norman Barnes, the former Treasurer, told me:

“It didn’t truly have any influence on the estate. ... I think people very largely went their own way. The Tenants’ Association’s influence on the estate was minimal.”¹⁹⁴

This, it would appear, was because in spite of the glowing praise bestowed upon the Association by Mr. Parsons, many of the residents agreed with the L.C.C. in their assessment of Putney Park House as solely a drinking club. Although the R.E.T.A. had originally aimed to break down the tendency of the Roehampton residents discussed in the previous chapter to adopt a privatised, home and family-centred lifestyle, it was unable to do this for its drinking aspect ensured it was frequently of little general appeal. This point was stressed to me most notably by several women from the estate, who, although it was never made explicit, were possibly especially alienated by the masculinity of the whole affair:

¹⁹¹ Interview with Mr. Parsons.

¹⁹² *The Roehampton Estate Gazette* 3 (3) (March 1925), 5; 2 (1) (December 1923), 4; and 4 (5) (May June 1926), 4.

¹⁹³ R.E.T.A.’s Fourteenth Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 29.3.38. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Mr. Barnes.

“No we never went to the R.E.T.A. club. My mother and father never socialised like that. There was never the money to spend on beer. And that’s all it was.”¹⁹⁵

“They just ran the club as a social club you see, nothing much else. ... Well if you liked drinking a lot, that was alright, but if you didn’t like to drink a lot, then there was nothing in it.”¹⁹⁶

“The only people that went to the Tenants’ Association were those that wanted to drink, and that automatically cuts out people.”¹⁹⁷

As Margaret Newman explained to me, the R.E.T.A. was neither representative nor creative of community on Roehampton. Although, as I have noted in the previous chapter, Mrs. Newman saw the estate as a “very stable, very secure community” with a “great feeling of community amongst the people,” this was in no way due to the Association:

“Of course we had no real community base. We had the R.E.T.A. club just down here which in theory was meant to be a tenants’ association, but *it has never been a tenants’ association*. Its been a drinking/social club, its not been a tenants’ association as a place which you felt represented the tenants in the area at all. And so there was no sort of communal hall or anything like that, so there was no feeling of community from that point of view.”¹⁹⁸

The impact of the drinking activities of the R.E.T.A on its wider role was also a focus for comment by the local branch of the Labour Party in 1930 when it was pressing the L.C.C. to provide an area of land for a hall. Somewhat ironically, it also adopted the conceptualization of the estate as a community. Yet the Party’s view was that the Association was of dubious benefit to the estate community. A centre was required, the L.C.C. were told, to allow the Party’s members to give vent to their educational, social and artistic aspirations. Although these aspirations were remarkably similar to those which the R.E.T.A. also claimed to hold, the Labour supporters’ view was that they had been “isolated in a self-contained community for life without any provision for their recreation,” for:

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Mrs. Power.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Mrs. Slaughter.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Mrs. Newman.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Mrs. Newman. Her emphasis.

“The Club House rented by the R.E.T.A. is not available for general use, and even if it were ... many people also object to it as it is mainly a centre for the consumption of drink.”

The Association, it was argued, catered only “for a very small number of the community here.”¹⁹⁹

(iii) W.R.A.: Creating Community.

As I have pointed out in Chapter One, the Yeos have argued that working-class organisations have often been reluctant to employ languages of community, considering that the middle-class embrace of the term has corrupted its meanings. The case of the W.R.A., which although it did not pursue working-class aims did still have among its members people with working-class values, raises doubts about this conclusion. Although it is fair to say that the Association never used any construction of the estate as a ‘community’ which it represented in the legitimating sense that the R.E.T.A. did, the W.R.A. did still envisage itself as creative of community for Watling’s residents. Although there was no suggestion that the residents were middle-class and therefore inclined towards snobbish respectability and insularity, the Association still argued that it was necessary to make community for them because they were all strangers in a strange place and, moreover, not sociable enough to do it themselves.

As I have described in the previous chapter, if there is any popular basis to the claims of Durant that Watling was lacking in community, it is restricted to the first year or so of the estate. At that time, when the estate was still being completed and people had just moved from the central areas of London, the tenants, I have argued, could envisage themselves as buried in the country away from their old friends and neighbours and with an absence of social connections with their new ones. To some of the residents this amounted to a lack of community. The W.R.A., it would appear, believed so too and its purpose in organising social

¹⁹⁹ Letter from H. Irons (Labour Party Hon. Ward Sec.) to the Clerk of the L.C.C., 2.4.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7512.

activities for the tenants of Watling was to change the situation, to create community.

On the first page of the first issue of the *Resident*, for instance, the difficulties faced by the new settlers on the estate were outlined:

“When we have been torn up by the roots, and rudely transplanted to foreign soil, as most of us here have been, we are lonely. ... Beyond our immediate neighbours we know no-one on this great Estate. We are dumb, shy and lonely, when we might be articulate, friendly and companionable. Our pleasures we enjoy alone, and our troubles we must suffer alone. There are many on the estate with similar hopes, aspirations, hobbies and interests, but we do not know them, and they do not know us.”

It was further noted, however, that “man [*sic*] is by nature gregarious, that is, he gathers into communities, and is unhappy in solitude.” The aim of the W.R.A., therefore, was to “bring together” the residents of Watling mainly by means of its social activities. It was to make the residents “good neighbours and good friends.”²⁰⁰ Or as Rev. Copinger put it, “the idea of the Association was to promote a spirit of comradeship on the estate.”²⁰¹

In much the same way as on Roehampton, however, the W.R.A. was going to create community not just because there was not any on the estate, but also because the residents were considered unable to do so themselves without encouragement. In contrast to Roehampton, this was not because the Watling residents were viewed as middle-class and used to the genteel and snobbish respectability of villadom with its insularity and artificiality. Rather, it was simply argued that, save in rare instances, they lacked “the faculty of quickly making friends.”

“Civilization tends to make us suspicious, and careful of the needs only of ‘number one.’ We all need to be more truly ‘sociable.’”²⁰²

Again, therefore, this was a conceptualization of community that had to be made for the residents from above, rather than them making it themselves. Again, as for the R.E.T.A., this legitimated the activities of the Association and bound them into a social theory of community.

²⁰⁰ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 3.

²⁰¹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 1.2.29., 9.

²⁰² *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 3.

Obviously, in light of my comments in the previous chapter on the especially gregarious nature of Watling's residents and their frequent displays of public sociability, such a claim by the W.R.A. appears dubious. I do not wish to repeat points made in Chapter Four, but I will emphasise that the residents of Watling were perfectly capable of developing a sense of 'community amongst the people' without the Association's help. In addition to this, however, there are once again, in a near mirror image of the R.E.T.A., two other problems with such a conceptualization of community. First, the W.R.A. and its activities were patriarchal. Women were almost totally unrepresented within the higher levels of the Association and were perceived as having solely 'home' interests. Second, the W.R.A catered for only a very small proportion of the estate's total population. Not only did organisations which arranged similar social attractions to the Association develop and draw off support, but the W.R.A.'s own sub-sections disaffiliated.

When the first meeting of the W.R.A. was advertised in the *Times* by the Association's founding members, the newspaper, in a somewhat enlightened manner, also reported that:

"Ladies are invited to the meeting, as indeed they should be, for if the Association is to be a success women must not be denied a voice in the management."²⁰³

This, however, was not to be the case. As was noted above, the founders of the Association were all men, and it was they who formed the first Committee. Further, as Durant writes:

"Incidentally, few women played a prominent part during the early years on the Estate; most having large families and small children were too overburdened with housework."²⁰⁴

Any community created by the W.R.A. was not just patriarchal in that women were generally excluded from it. As on Roehampton, where they were included their roles and interests were assumed to lie solely in the domestic realm. This assumption was reinforced once again through the Ladies' Page of the

^{2 3} *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 30.12.27., 6.

²⁰⁴ R. Durant, *Watling*, 28.

Association's journal. The first, for instance, with its recipes for cold fish salad and baked egg fricassie, was hardly suffragette material:

"I do not propose giving articles on the wrongs of women, or the rights of men. ... What we do want, I take it, is something of general home and like interests: will you offer suggestions as to subjects? ... Household hints and original recipes ... are especially welcome."²⁰⁵

Besides the Association's patriarchal nature, however, the W.R.A.'s view of itself as creative of community is further problematised by the lack of support it received. I do not wish to claim that the W.R.A.'s attempts to organise social activities were a failure. The Fête and Gala, for instance, was attended by over five thousand residents, "an unqualified success."²⁰⁶ To claim, however, as the Association did, "the record and undeniable credit of having 'blazed the trail' of good-fellowship on the Estate," was something of an exaggeration.²⁰⁷

A somewhat damning indictment of its role and influence on the estate, for instance, was that not one of my interviewees had been able to remember it. True, some of them may have been too young to have been aware of it, particularly in view of its short life. Other contemporary sources, however, tend to reinforce the suggestion that it simply was not greatly supported. First, only just over a year after the Association's formation its most popular sub-sections began to disaffiliate. The reason given, according to an article in the *Resident* entitled "What's Wrong With The W.R.A.", was "unnecessary interference by the Executive Committee" in their affairs.²⁰⁸ Second, other groups aiming to cater, in part at least, for the social needs of the tenants also developed.

As early as March 1929, for instance, the Watling Horticultural Society became independent of the W.R.A. and "threw its ranks open to everybody on the estate."²⁰⁹ This happened despite Mackay, the W.R.A. Chairman, being one of the

²⁰⁵ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 18.

²⁰⁶ *The Watling Resident* 1 (3) (July 1928), 66; and 1 (2) (June 1928), 40.

²⁰⁷ *The Watling Resident* 2 (2) (June 1929), 12.

²⁰⁸ *The Watling Resident* 1 (12) (April 1929), 313.

²⁰⁹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (11) (March 1929), 264.

members of the Association's Horticultural Sub-Committee.²¹⁰ Previously, it was argued:

“Very little, if anything at all, was done to encourage and help gardening enthusiasts on the Estate while this was under the auspices of the main body.”²¹¹

Once freed from the W.R.A., however, the Society set about organising the Estate's first Flower and Vegetable Show to be held in the Summer. Two hundred and thirty-four people entered flowers.²¹² Lectures were arranged too, and were also well-supported. The size of the audiences they attracted was such that “it is considered advisable to be in good time to avoid standing.”²¹³

The Sports Sub-Section of the W.R.A. followed the gardeners' example and their success. Although by May 1929 it was reported that there was “great progress, both as regards the actual teams playing and very successful dances and outings held by its members,” most of those responsible were no longer “connected with the W.R.A.”²¹⁴ Even more so when Ingram, the living embodiment of the Association's ideal of ‘Good Fellowship’ and the founder of the Sports Sub-Section, was not re-elected to its Committee in 1929.²¹⁵ Its success as an autonomous body was marked in December 1929, when more than two hundred people “flocked” to a dance of the Watling Athletic and Football Club, as it had become known.²¹⁶

Not only were sub-sections breaking away from the W.R.A., but completely independent clubs and societies were also being formed. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter the Old Comrades' Association had been established in 1929 with aims very similar to those of the W.R.A.: to promote social activities and good fellowship. It was certainly popular. Although its membership was only seventy by April 1929, the O.C.A. was soon attracting over four hundred people to the

²¹⁰ *The Watling Resident* 1 (1) (May 1928), 5.

²¹¹ *The Watling Resident* 2 (1) (May 1929), 14.

²¹² *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 26.7.29., 9.

²¹³ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 11.10.29., 8.

²¹⁴ *The Watling Resident* 2 (1) (May 1929), 14.

²¹⁵ *The Watling Resident* 2 (8) (December 1929), 19.

²¹⁶ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 6.12.29., 14.

dances it arranged.²¹⁷ As the Editorial of the *Resident* noted, its success “has been very obvious to all from its first meeting.”²¹⁸ According to ‘The Rover’, “a happier body of men will be hard to find anywhere.”²¹⁹

Also from early 1929 the women of Watling, marginalised within the W.R.A. and excluded from much of the male bonding of the O.C.A., were given their opportunity for socialising within a Woman’s Institute on Watling, later to be known as the Townswomen’s Guild (its other activities are discussed in the next chapter).²²⁰ Organised by Mrs. Corbett Ashby of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, this was intended “to serve as a common meeting ground for all women”, and to “supply the need for a social centre.”²²¹ Whist drives and dances were included in its scope, and they appear to have been popular. By June 1929 it was reported that “the afternoons are always crowded.”²²² In November, a social evening it organised attracted over seventy members and friends.²²³

In view of this sectionalism and competition, therefore, the W.R.A., I suggest, became increasingly insignificant within the life of the estate. As early as December 1928, for instance, there were complaints from both organisers and competitors over the poor attendances at the Association’s whist drives.²²⁴ Then, several months later, at the Quarterly General Meeting at the end of July 1929, “the attendance was not up to expectations.”²²⁵ The strongest indication that the residents of Watling were falling through the holes in the W.R.A.’s net of community, however, is that membership levels plummeted. By May 1929, for instance, there were just ninety-four people who belonged to the Association. Admittedly, the estate was still being completed and populated, yet the membership the previous year

²¹⁷ *The Watling Resident* 1 (12) (April 1929), 289.

²¹⁸ *The Watling Resident* 2 (1) (May 1929), 14.

²¹⁹ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 21.6.29., 13.

²²⁰ *The Watling Resident* 1 (11) (March 1929), 270; and 2 (5) (September 1929), 12.

²²¹ *The Watling Resident* 1 (12) (April 1929), 302-3; and 1 (10) (February 1929), 234.

²²² *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 21.6.29., 13.

²²³ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 15.11.29., 8.

²²⁴ *The Watling Resident* 1 (8) (December 1928), 188.

²²⁵ *The Watling Resident* 2 (4) (August 1929), 16.

had been over four hundred.²²⁶ The W.R.A. could only lament the disintegration of its ideal of community:

“Why cannot we be a big, happy family instead of disjointed groups?”

“Do not let us get a disjointed tangle of societies and clubs on the Estate.”

“Let us have cohesion and not confusion! Do not let the onlooker sneer but rather praise the wonderful corporate spirit and vitality of Watling.”²²⁷

Their plea for a cohesive and corporate spirit was really a plea for a role for their Association.

(iv) Conclusion.

It can be seen, therefore, that both the R.E.T.A. and W.R.A. did use particular notions of community. These notions, I argue, were, much like the actual Associations, similar yet finely distinguishable. Both Associations saw themselves as creative of community for the residents of their respective estates, and in both cases this was a social theory of community dependent on the horizontal integration of the residents by means of the Association's activities. There was to be a greater sense of friendliness, comradeship, fellowship - the words are interchangeable, and they were interchanged. In both cases although the underlying reasons of the Associations for seeking to do this were different, they were again similar in that they believed that the residents could not make their own community. It is, however, questionable that the notions of community of the W.R.A. and R.E.T.A. meant a great deal to many of the residents of the estates on the evidence of the levels of support they received. A further similarity that must be stressed is that their notions of community were not in any sense extended to an egalitarian relationship between the sexes. Both Associations were patriarchal in terms of the participation of women within their affairs and the Associations' attempts to cater for their interests. Such sexism could only undermine their search for the community.

There, however, the similarities between the W.R.A. and R.E.T.A. come to an abrupt conclusion. The social community of the R.E.T.A., with its membership

²²⁶ *The Watling Resident* 2 (1) (May 1929), 14.

drawn from at least the labour aristocracy and lower middle class, was permeated, I have argued, with notions of respectability, decency and morality closely tied to its search for uplift, the creation of a Garden Suburb, and desire for a village way of life. In many ways, their ideal of community represented a contrast with areas of town they had left behind. This was a point recognised by one of the tenants I spoke to there. It was a 'new way of life', characterised by the values of rural England, intimately connected to ideas of, for instance, pleasurable pursuits, harmonious social relations and healthier living in contrast to the social and physical problems of the overcrowded areas they had left behind. There was, I suggest, more than a hint of morality and respectability about it all. This was never apparent in the ideal of community of the more working-class W.R.A.

It was also never the case on Watling that the W.R.A. waved a banner of community to legitimate itself. Although by claiming to create community it was obviously presenting itself as inherently worthy of support, it did not do this in the same way as the R.E.T.A. On Roehampton, I have argued, the Association saw itself as not just the provider of community life, but its protector too. This, I can only suggest, was because the Association, active over a longer period and doing more than the W.R.A., believed that such a legitimating construct of the estate as a community helped them in what they were trying to do.

E. Conclusion.

There have been several inter-related themes to the argument of this chapter, all of which are crucial to a fuller understanding of the conceptions of community of the tenants' organisations that developed on Roehampton and Watling. It has been stressed that neither the W.R.A. nor the R.E.T.A. were militant working-class bodies. The class structure of the R.E.T.A. was representative of that of the middle-class and skilled working-class nature of the estate's wider population. Amongst the Association's founding members, for instance, many were forced to leave the estate

²²⁷ *The Watling Resident* 2 (6) (October 1929), 14.

by the L.C.C. when the Council realised they had no genuine claim to subsidised housing. The W.R.A., on the other hand, although undoubtedly composed of members of the working class, who were political outside of the Association's activities, rigidly adhered to a non-political basis for its activities. This was much to the dismay of some of the estate's residents who fought to change this, ultimately without success. These organisations were organised not along shared class or political lines, but common residence of each estate. Rather than militant agitating, the basis of both Associations was the infrastructural improvement of the estates - generally pursued along non-antagonistic lines - and the development of social bonds between the tenants across each estate. This was central to their uses of the idea of community.

A central aspect of both Associations' ideal of community, the only aspect in the case of the W.R.A. in fact, was that community depended upon the development of the horizontal social bonds between the tenants. The Associations wanted to link together the residents. Community was a notion reliant upon increased social interaction between the tenants. It was a social theory of community dependent upon the tenants' comradeship, fellowship and sociability. On Watling this was expressed in terms of good fellowship. On Roehampton it was also intimately bound up with the village ideal - the ideal of harmonious social relations. The activities within this community were social, sporting and gardening events. Even on Watling, there was no overtly political edge to the W.R.A.'s community ideal.

With both the W.R.A. and the R.E.T.A., their use of community can largely be characterised as a reflection of their attempts to build broad bases of support for their activities. A central feature of both estates, it needs to be stressed, is that the R.E.T.A. and the W.R.A. wanted to link the residents together with themselves at the centre of the community. This is why they needed a club house, or, as it was depicted on Roehampton, a village hall. Reflecting the stress placed upon greater friendship - the need for enhanced horizontal social bonds between the tenants - the ideal of community of both Associations was designed to encompass all of the residents upon the estates. Although the Associations' discourse of community was

one prioritising themselves, it can hardly be considered ideological, however. It was not *that* organised or forcefully promoted. Yet it is true that the Associations did try and claim a central place in the lives of the residents, to legitimate their activities, and to give their activities meaning. They presented themselves as creating community - the very phrase can only be viewed as inherently worthy of support. The R.E.T.A. took it a step further as well. The Association not merely created community, but it also protected it for the tenants of Roehampton.

In contrast to the discourses of community 'amongst the people' outlined in the previous chapter, it is evident that the community of the two Associations was based on organised activity. It was community made for the people, not by the people and it was constituted through the particular social activities that were to exist in clubs or school halls or wherever the events were held. As I have said it was also a community designed to include the whole estate, not just neighbours or streets or blocks of flats - as was the case with many aspects of community 'amongst the people'. The whole estate, however, was not included in this community in structurally equal roles. Women were disadvantaged in this ideal of community - they were only included in structurally unequal roles. They were under-represented and assumed to have no interests outside the domestic realm. In this respect, it was similar to the notions of community 'amongst the people' detailed in the previous chapter.

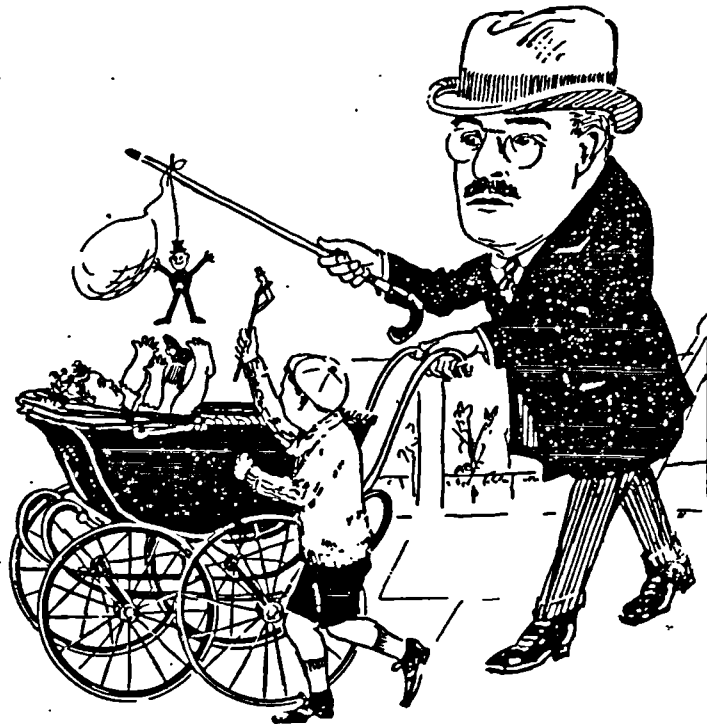
The success of both the W.R.A. and R.E.T.A. in encompassing all and sundry within the nets of community that they attempted to throw over the estates is questionable, therefore. The community of the Associations did not correspond to any great extent with the community of 'the people' and women were marginalised within it. Moreover, it is also evident that people more generally slipped through the holes in the nets. Neither Association received particularly impressive levels of support. In the case of Watling, in fact, some of residents did not so much fall through the W.R.A.'s net of community, rather they cut the net open and ran away.

A major aspect of the community that the R.E.T.A. sought to create on Roehampton, and a significant contrast to the community of the W.R.A., is that

reflecting the middle-class values and ideals of the Association and the estate more generally, the social aspect of community was also woven together with notions of a respectable and moral community. In the community of the R.E.T.A., not simply were there raised levels of friendliness and comradeship, but the community of respectably educated residents existed within a Garden Suburb with a village atmosphere. It was a *new way of life* - a community way of life - contrasting with the urban squalor the residents had been forced to live in after being separated by the war from genteel suburban villadom. They were no longer in the morally, socially and physically malignant city. Now they were living in the image - the dream - of England, where humanity could prosper, and they were going to make sure that it did prosper. Such moral underpinnings of community also appear in the next chapter. The Community Association movement, I argue, saw itself as the creator of a new moral community. For them the cottage council estates were an ideal place to begin work.

LOCAL CELEBRITIES (No. 2).

Chairman R.E.T.A.



"You should see me on Sundays"

Plate 5.1: Cartoon of Mr. J. Duley
(Source: The Roehampton Estate Gazette)

Stupendous Carnival
of Sport and Fun **6d.**

at . . .

GRANARD

: Putney Park Lane :

Village Sports Races for Old and Young . . Entrance . . . on the ground

Side Shows Amusements for All Come and . . . enjoy the Fun
--

Grand Display of Flowers and
Vegetables grown on the Estate.

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY

Monday, August 1st.

Teas and Refreshments at Popular Prices

Children's Fancy Dress Parade

Assemble in Club House, The Pleasance at 1.30 p.m.
Admission 3d. - including entry to Grounds

Under the direction of the Roehampton Tenants' Association, Ltd. and
the Garden Society.

GRANARD—AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY

Plate 5.2: Advertisement for R.E.T.A. Sports Festival
(Source: The Roehampton Estate Gazette)

Monopoly is Bad ! Competition is good for all !

Roeampton Estate Garden Society

Is holding its 2nd Annual

FLOWER and
VEGETABLE **SHOW**

— AND —

SPORTS GALA

On SATURDAY, AUGUST 4th, 1923

At TWO p.m.

Prizes Value over £30 for Exhibits.

£5 allocated for the Best Front and Back Gardens.

Special Prizes for Allotments.

Confined and Open Events.

Estate Residents Eligible for all Entries.

Members Exhibit Free. Non-Members 3d. each Exhibit.

Special Children's Classes.

Sports for all ages - - Valuable Prizes.

All Children's Sports - FREE.

Military Band. Dancing. Side Shows.

SEE SMALL HANDBILLS FOR SCHEDULE.

Further Particulars and Entrance Forms from Organising Secretary,
W. G. BALL, 46, Pleasance Road, S.W.15.

Do not confuse this with the Estate Festival.

Plate 5.3: Advertisement for the Roeampton Estate Garden Show, 1923
(Source: The Roeampton Estate Gazette)

Local Celebrities

No. 8.

MUSICAL SOCIETY SECRETARY



Plate 5.4: Cartoon of Mr. R. Coe
(Source: The Roehampton Estate Gazette)

CHAPTER SIX - MORAL COMMUNITIES.

A. Introduction.

In the previous two chapters I have detailed several different conceptualizations of community that were present on the estates of Roehampton and Watling. In contrast to sociological wisdom, it has been stressed that the residents of the estates did, in many cases, view their estates as communities. Further, I have argued that their Tenants'/Residents' Associations saw themselves, most notably, as creating community for the residents through their varied activities, even if these claims were somewhat problematic. In this chapter I now wish to turn my attention to the activities of the Community Association movement, a movement that was also concerned to make community on the new estates.

I begin by detailing the history, objectives and activities of the Community Association movement at the national level as embodied within the New Estates Community Committee [N.E.C.C.]. Formed in 1928 under the auspices of the National Council of Social Service [N.C.S.S.], this was a Committee composed also of representatives from the British Association of Residential Settlements [B.A.R.S.] and the Educational Settlements Association [E.S.A.]. The concern of the N.E.C.C., as its title suggests, was community on the developing cottage council estates, or more specifically, in line with other contemporary views, the lack of community. This, however, was not because it perceived the residents as unable to make their own community, but rather because it saw an opportunity to develop that community in the manner that it thought was best: a community organised along the lines of moral worth and the improvement of the residents. The Community Association movement, I argue, was not concerned to displace militant working-class activity among the tenants' organisations, so much as aiming to ensure that their activities, their social, cultural, educational and physical activities, were of a high moral standard. By controlling and moulding the residents' use of their leisure time in particular, the N.E.C.C. sought to make the estates into moral communities.

In the second section of the chapter I examine the attempt to implement this programme at the local level on the Roehampton estate. I have described in the

previous chapter that although the community of the R.E.T.A. was a social community, it also had very definite moral overtones to it. The Association aimed to 'uplift' the tenants. Further, a recurrent theme in its activities was the creation of the most charming Garden Suburb of London. It was to have the feel of a village too. The community of the R.E.T.A. was to be an improvement upon the areas people had moved away from. They had left the hell of the metropolis behind to reside in the vision of heaven inspired by Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin. This was a new way of life - morally, physically and socially - in comparison to the malignancy of urbanised and industrialised England. Essentially, it was not that different from the ideal of community propagated and pursued by the N.E.C.C. However, as I have also noted, from 1932 onwards the founders of the R.E.T.A. with such worthy ideals were forced to leave the estate by the L.C.C. Uplifting educational activities rapidly ceased. The Club and Institute became more widely recognised as a male drinking club. The R.E.T.A.'s version of social community co-existing with moral community had changed. The morality was no longer evident.

This, I argue, prompted the appearance of the Community Association movement in the form of the London Council of Social Service [L.C.S.S.]. They were particularly concerned about the immoral nature of the drinking activities of the Association and their use of leisure time for solely amusement purposes. In a tried and tested fashion, the L.C.S.S. sought to establish a Community Association on the estate to correct the sordid state of affairs. Their method of doing this was to offer to build a Community Centre offering more accommodation than Putney Park House. Initially this was welcomed by the Association and its members. Only initially, however, for when it became apparent that the L.C.C. had decided that neither the proposed Community Centre nor Putney Park House would be allowed to retain a bar, they rejected the scheme and concentrated their efforts upon persuading the L.C.C. to reverse its decision concerning their bar. The R.E.T.A. needed the income from the bar to remain alive. To the dismay of the L.C.S.S., who were depending upon the bar not being allowed so that they could set up their Association, the R.E.T.A. was ultimately successful. The social community of the R.E.T.A., I argue, had resisted the advances of the moral community of the Community

Association movement.

In the third section of the chapter, I detail the activities of the N.E.C.C. on Watling. There they were successful in establishing a Community Association and building a Community Centre. It is stressed, however, that their efforts to create a moral community did not go according plan. They encountered several problems, in fact, not least of which were the Communists on the estate. Much as they had attempted to re-direct the aims of the W.R.A., the Communists became active in the Community Association, intent on subverting its purposes so that it pursued their objectives. A Communist Sunday School which denied the existence of God, for instance, was not exactly imbued with the same morality as the N.E.C.C. In view of such actions, the Communists were eventually removed from the Association. Even their temporary presence, however, was to prove an enduring legacy that did not benefit the N.E.C.C.'s pursuit of community. The Community Association and its ideal of community had become associated with Communism, I argue, resulting in a lack of support for its activities. Both organisations and individual residents of the estate were consequently unwilling to give their support for the Association and its promotion of moral community. It is stressed that this also occurred for reasons other than the Communists. Organisations on Watling also refused to become a part of the ideal of moral community because they either disagreed with it or they saw no point in it. Moreover, support from the individual residents was also rarely forthcoming because they did not wish to have their leisure restricted to the moralising forms supplied by the Association. It is pointed out that even the L.C.C. had its doubts about the Community Association, viewing it more as an estate agitation than a moralising force.

B. The New Estates Community Committee.

In this first section of the Chapter, I wish to trace the origins, aims and activities of the New Estates Community Committee at the national level. This will provide a context for the discussion in subsequent sections of the attempts to implement its values at the local level on Roehampton and Watling.

Without wishing to provide a detailed history of the B.A.R.S., E.S.A. and

N.C.S.S., I begin by highlighting values and activities characteristic of these bodies which were, I argue, set to permeate much, if not all, of their work on the cottage council estates. In all three cases I stress that there was a concern to morally improve the poor, whether by uplifting them spiritually, mentally or physically. The organisations were permeated with the notions of moral worth and improvement. These were notions that were to re-occur in their work together as the N.E.C.C. on the cottage council estates. These new estates, I argue, were viewed by the N.E.C.C. as not simply lacking in community, but as also offering the opportunity to develop community along their *ideal* lines. Although the residents could make a start through the social activities of their tenants' associations, it was argued that they needed outside guidance to develop the right sort of community. This, I argue, was to be a community distinct from the social, physical and moral evils associated with the urbanisation and industrialisation of Britain and would be based primarily upon a constructive use of leisure along with the co-operation of all and a sense of citizenship. Community was to be achieved through the voluntary service of resident to resident, and from those outside the estate offering 'guidance'. In contrast to the Yeos, therefore, I suggest that the Community Association movement was not so much concerned with displacing the militant working-class activities of the tenants' organisations, as it was to ensure that they pursued activities that would morally improve the tenants, activities that would make for a moral community. This, I point out, was an aim that received ever increasing support from the local authorities in general and also from central government.

(i) The Settlement Movement And The National Council.

"Most voluntary social services today bear witness to a rapidly increasing appreciation of the moral factor in human affairs. ... Their workers believe that human society is capable of infinite development."¹

The workers of the three voluntary organisations that came together to form the New Estates Community Committee, I argue, held the moral factor in human affairs very close to their hearts and believed that under their guidance society was indeed capable of infinite development. The Federation of Residential Settlements (renamed in 1928 the British Association of Residential Settlements) had been

¹ *Social Service Review* XX (8) (August 1939), 255.

established in 1920. The origins of the movement rested with Toynbee Hall which opened in Whitechapel in 1885.² By 1928, forty-seven settlements had been set up.³ The vision of their founders was:

“The idea of a world set free from sin and misery whose citizens, high and low alike, would share in a great adventure of beauty and fine living.”⁴

To be a good citizen, it was necessary to be:

“Self-supporting, knowledgeable, serving others, realizing common moral ends and aiming at some kind of perfection.”⁵

Their philosophy was “a protest against ... a low standard of culture.”⁶ To overcome it they sought to place groups of graduates “among their neighbours in an industrial district.”⁷ These educated young men and women would improve their neighbours “physical, moral, and spiritual well-being.”⁸ They would be “vitalising and creative forces,” “draining swamps of ignorance” and setting “a high standard of human relationship before their members.” From Toynbee Hall, for instance, a “light shone out which has illuminated the dark places of society.”⁹ To an extent the methods of achieving such moral, physical and spiritual uplift were limited to organising general social and informal activities for the youths and adults of the Settlements’ districts. Education, however, also featured prominently. As an early champion of the movement put it:

“The lower classes should have enough teaching to prevent them from being disgusting.”¹⁰

In this area of its work, therefore, the B.A.R.S. was closely connected with

² R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours: The Development of the Community Association Movement in Britain* (London, 1990), 13.

³ Statement of constitution and aims of constituents of N.E.C.C., submitted by L. Ellis to Housing Committee, 12.2.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7512.

⁴ British Association of Residential Settlements, ‘Introduction’ to *Annual Report: 1934-5*, no pagination.

⁵ A. Vincent & R. Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (Oxford, 1984), 142.

⁶ British Association of Residential Settlements, ‘Foreword’ to *Annual Report: 1935-8*, 3.

⁷ British Association of Residential Settlements, ‘Introduction’ to *Annual Report: 1934-5*, no pagination.

⁸ Statement of constitution and aims of constituents of N.E.C.C., submitted by L. Ellis to Housing Committee, 12.2.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7512.

⁹ British Association of Residential Settlements, ‘Introduction’ to *Annual Report: 1934-5*, no pagination.

¹ British Association of Residential Settlements, ‘Introduction’ to *Annual Report: 1934-5*, no pagination.

the Educational Settlements Association. Originating in 1903, this had been born of a concern of the adult school movement and the Society of Friends to provide opportunities “for bible study and general self-education.”¹¹ Although its numbers were less than the B.A.R.S. (in 1928 there were fifteen settlements), its aims, although more restricted to education and somewhat less explicit, were similar:

“The purpose of the Association is ... promotion and development of permanent centres of adult education in which a broad and tolerant spirit, and the uniting bond of a common life are essential factors. ... [And] To encourage at these centres continuous and progressive study.”¹²

Working together, it was argued, the Settlement Movement would provide places:

“Where men and women, young and old, could meet to get recreation after the day’s work and incidentally to derive not a little of mental, moral and physical improvement.”¹³

Such improvement was also of much concern to the National Council of Social Service, which had been formed soon after the end of World War I in March 1919 by “a small number of people deeply concerned about social conditions,” and which was later to become the leading light of the N.E.C.C.¹⁴ The pioneers of the Council were “leading social workers and reformers” who were supported in their motives by a number of central and local government workers and a dozen national voluntary organisations that had mainly developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Among the supporting organisations, for instance, were the National Association of Guilds of Help, the Charity Organisation Society, Councils of Social Welfare and the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association.¹⁶ The ideal they all had in mind was to improve the work of such voluntary, philanthropic societies in aid of the ‘distressed’ and ‘fallen’ members of society. This, it was believed, could be achieved by co-ordinating and federating the diverse organisations - so as to “eliminate confusion and overlapping” - and then working in co-operation with the newly developing statutory services:

¹¹ R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 15.

¹² Statement of constitution and aims of constituents of N.E.C.C., submitted by L. Ellis to Housing Committee, 12.2.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7512.

¹³ *Community* I (1) (September-October 1937), 11.

¹⁴ L. Farrer-Brown, ‘Foreword’, in M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action: A History Of The National Council Of Social Service* (London, 1969), vii.

¹⁵ M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 1.

¹⁶ M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 20.

“It was not a totally new idea. It had begun to emerge in some form in the administration of the Poor Law, the Charity Organisation Society, and the Guilds of Help. But it needed to be re-stated in new terms at a time of rapid social change when the new public social services were making an increasing impact on social life.”¹⁷

The N.C.S.S. wanted to co-ordinate the service to the community performed by the plethora of philanthropic groups that already existed. As was stressed to the London Council of Social Service, which pre-dated the National Council but was intimately bound up with it in terms of personnel and ideas, it did not seek to:

“Replace, but only to assist, the great volume of devoted and individual service which you and others are contributing to the good of the community.”¹⁸

The N.C.S.S.’s first aim was to encourage the development of local councils of social service in the major urban areas, and later in rural villages, so as to implement its ideals on the ground.¹⁹ The early activities of these local councils in the towns, I wish to stress, provides an indication of some of the ideals and activities that would later permeate the National Council’s work on the cottage council estates. In addition, for instance, to securing playing fields and open spaces:

“The work ranged far and wide: ... assisting in anti-VD campaigns; bringing together groups responsible for rescue and preventative work for young girls; also those concerned with infant and child welfare, or with the welfare of the blind or mentally deficient.”²⁰

It was also thought important by the National Council to consider not just such “relief work”, but also the use of the greater opportunities for leisure that were, supposedly, arising with the general shortening of the working week. Support was sought, for instance, from organisations such as the British Drama League, British Musical Society and English Folk Dance Society.²¹ The way was opened “to a lively partnership with many bodies whose aims were educational and cultural.”²²

This is obviously little more than a glimpse of the National Council’s activities. Numerous other activities were undertaken.²³ Such an outline does,

¹⁷ M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 19.

¹⁸ *Social Service Bulletin* VI (12) (December 1926), 141.

¹⁹ M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 24.

²⁰ M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 25.

²¹ N.C.S.S., *First Annual Report: 1919-20*, 6.

²² M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 27.

²³ On schools for the unemployed, for instance, see *Social Service Bulletin* III (7) (July 1923), 263.

however, highlight the wide scope of the N.C.S.S.'s activities and the limited scope of its concerns and values. Brasnett notes, for instance, that there was a "concern for the quality of life."²⁴ As with the Settlement Movement, however, this concern, was one with distinct moral overtones. The 'fallen' were to be 'lifted' whilst the leisure time of the masses was to be catered for by educational and cultural activities. It was these common moral themes, together with particular characteristics of each organisation (such as the N.C.S.S.'s desire for voluntary service and co-operation and the B.A.R.S.'s pursuit of citizenship and practise of sending in 'enlightened', educated outsiders) that were to become central to their joint work on the new council estates.

(ii) The New Housing Estates.

"While the new estates had been developing fast on the suburban fringe, the N.C.S.S. had been observing them and their growing problems."²⁵

Indeed they had, and in 1925 the National Council made their first effort to convene a national conference with the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association and the National Housing and Town Planning Council to discuss the problems. The problems, the *Social Service Bulletin* recorded, indicating two themes which were to run through all subsequent discussion of the estates, were, first, lack of meeting places in which adult education, music, drama or the work of juvenile organisations could be developed. Second, the belief that although the tenants could create some standard of social life for themselves, "a lead is needed."²⁶ However, the planning organisations which were being appealed to failed to recognise these problems, and the conference never happened.²⁷

If the National Council's activities on the cottage council estates had been delayed, the Federation of Residential Settlements took up the challenge, resolving in 1927 to establish a settlement in Becontree. Colonel (later Brigadier General) Sir Wyndham Deedes was a central figure within this, and would remain prominent in the Community Association movement throughout the inter-war period. (See Plate

1923), 1.

²⁴ M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 63.

²⁵ M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 62.

²⁶ *Social Service Bulletin* V (3) (March 1925), 25-6.

²⁷ R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 26.

6.1). With a lack of finances, the scheme became a joint venture with the E.S.A., who the Carnegie Trustees were willing to support.²⁸ The N.C.S.S. Annual Report for 1928-9 described their “effort to further community work.” Becontree, and many other such estates, it was argued, contained hardly any of the social institutions of older towns, and their residents, who had moved out from more central districts, had few social activities to take the place of old ones left behind:

“Life is likely to be very dull unless some at least are developed.”²⁹

Indeed this dull life continued to attract the attention of the National Council. So much so that towards the end of 1929 the N.C.S.S. federated, as it tended to do, the E.S.A., B.A.R.S. and itself into the New Estates Community Committee, “an effort to deal with the social problem created” by the new estates.³⁰

‘Community Work In New Housing Estates’ was the title chosen for the statement by the three bodies which outlined their beliefs. This propaganda (as the NCSS termed it) was soon distributed. The *Service Service Review* reported it in full.³¹ The London County Council received a copy too.³² Within it, note was again made of the disruption caused to the residents’ social life by moving to the estates:

“Not a soul is a ‘native’. Every man, woman and child was born elsewhere. No one knows anyone else. ... Old associations and ties and old friendships have been severed. Everything has to be built up a fresh.”³³

As was repeatedly emphasised elsewhere, the estates were understood as lacking in community:

“Nowhere is there greater need for a sense of community. ... Social institutions have yet to be created. The emptiness of their new life is a challenge to action.”³⁴

As Arthur Greenwood, the Minister of Health, wrote of the estates’ residents, there

²⁸ R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 26-8.

²⁹ N.C.S.S., *Co-operation in Social Effort: Annual Report 1928-9*, 12-3.

³⁰ N.C.S.S., *Partnership in Social effort: Annual Report, 1937-8*, 31.

³¹ *Social Service Review* X (12) (December 1929), 252-4.

³² Community Work In New Housing Estates: Statement adopted by the Joint Conference of the Educational Settlements Association, the British Association of Residential Settlements, and the National Council of Social Service. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27. See also *Social Service Review* X (12) (December 1929), 252-4.

³³ Community Work In New Housing Estates. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1 27. See also *Social Service Review* X (12) (December 1929), 252-4.

³⁴ N.C.S.S., *Co-operation in Social Service: Annual Report 1929-30*, 7-9.

was “the problem of moulding those isolated individuals into a new community.”³⁵ Yet this problem, this challenge to action, as ‘Community Work In New Housing Estates’ made clear, was not because the N.E.C.C. did not believe that the estates would “turn themselves into a town.” Rather, the challenge was over what sort of town they should develop into. Of the existing English towns, note was made of the difficulty in changing their character. Yet the new estates were not old towns. On the contrary, they had no history and no traditions, everything had to be built up afresh. The new estates, therefore, were “the eggs from which to hatch towns.” The challenge to action focused upon:

“A golden but fleeting opportunity and a definite responsibility to start the corporate life of these new communities on the best lines possible.”³⁶

“Their very newness, their absence of any tradition, challenges those who live there to build up a community life that is something different from the life of the old towns.”³⁷

The cottage council estates were a clear field on which to build. The absence of any local tradition was a challenge, and opportunity, to build on new lines. There were, in fact, hopes to “develop a society that is informed by a new spirit.”³⁸ There was to be a community spirit different from the life of the old towns:

“Here are people of these new communities trying to develop their social life from a new starting point, in a new spirit and by new methods.”³⁹

What was this new spirit to be and what were the new methods to achieve it?

(iii) Building Better Communities.

The first essential in the development of community along the best lines possible was, in line with the spirit of the N.C.S.S., the federation of all groups on the estate:

“Any association formed to promote the building of a good community must bring into partnership all that may help to shape its life. Associations formed to promote particular interests, authorities providing social services,

³⁵ *Social Service Review* XI (8) (August 1930), 163.

³⁶ Community Work In New Housing Estates. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27. See also *Social Service Review* X (12) (December 1929), 252-4.

³⁷ *Social Service Review* XI (5) (May 1930), 93-8.

³⁸ N.C.S.S., *Voluntary Service: Annual Report 1932-3*, 12.

³⁹ N.C.S.S., *Voluntary Service: Annual Report 1932-3*, 29.

and individual residents must all collaborate.”⁴⁰

This federation (or Association) was to be the Community Association, and clearly it was not restricted to either the tenants or the residents of the estates. Rather, in line with the National Council’s belief in service and the traditions of the Settlement Movement, it was considered necessary:

“To establish within these communities groups of forward-thinking people who come for this purpose to live in the community and to become part of it.”⁴¹

“Someone must take the initiative and must help the residents to get things going if not only housing conditions but life itself is to be better in these new towns than in the old slums.”⁴²

This was not purely because the N.E.C.C. did not see the residents as capable of developing their own activities under their own leadership. The Tenants’ Associations of Liverpool received notable praise, for instance. Their activities included estate journals, the promotion of social life, sports, gardening clubs and junior clubs. Further:

“Nor are mental interests overlooked. There are literary and debating societies, dramatic societies and concerts. The hope is expressed that all new suburbs ... will follow the example.”⁴³

As the *Social Service Review* noted in 1930, “already a good deal has been done.”⁴⁴

However, such views were exceptional. More often it was argued that the tenants needed a broadening of their interests to enable them to pursue community on the ‘correct’ lines. A decade after the Liverpool Associations had been praised, for instance, Dr. Ernest Barker, the Chairman of the N.E.C.C. (or Community Centres and Associations’ Committee as it was renamed in 1938) addressed the Liverpool New Estates’ Council of Social Welfare:

“It took all sorts to make a world: whereas a world in a new Housing Estate was an artificial world, not as big and broad as it might be. ... It naturally wanted to be independent, and not to be patronised from outside. That was good; but on the other hand such a little world did need help, comfort and a widening of interest which could be given from outside, because in that way

⁴⁰ *Social Service Review* XI (5) (May 1930), 93-8.

⁴¹ Community Work In New Housing Estates. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27. See also *Social Service Review* X (12) (December 1929), 252-4.

⁴² N.C.S.S., *Co-operation in Social Service Annual Report 1928-9*, 12-3.

⁴³ *Social Service Bulletin* IX (12) (December 1928), 227-8; and Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid, *Quarterly Paper* IV (12) (October 1928), 200.

⁴⁴ *Social Service Review* XI (5) (May 1930), 93-8.

it was not wide enough.”⁴⁵

In particular, it was thought that there was a need for “wise leadership” by someone “widely experienced in social and educational work,” someone who could promote the correct type of social and educational activities which were central to the N.E.C.C.’s discourse of community.⁴⁶ The views that the N.C.S.S. expressed in 1925 remained unchanged. It was the lack of education and the need for proper direction of social activities which were the problematic features on the estates. Uplifting educational and social activities, activities that would overlap, were the central tenets of a community life different from the old towns.

The promotion of educational activities - a method of moral improvement obviously inherent within the Settlement Movement - is not that surprising. Its importance to the creation of community was frequently explicit. There should, it was argued, be “learning in the communal spirit.”⁴⁷ Wyndham Deedes placed particular emphasis upon education, and especially its role in promoting citizenship. Again, this is unsurprising given his background within the B.A.R.S. Through the medium of the Community Association “citizens” would have the opportunity of examining, discussing, and perhaps one day arranging their own local affairs in a far more intimate way than they did at present:

“As a first step these Associations are ideal means whereby to educate people in the arts of citizenship and to create an active, alert public opinion able to exercise a powerful influence on the determination of policy at the Town Hall in respect of local estate affairs.”⁴⁸

The need for ‘wise leadership’ in social activities, however, reflected a less explicit line of thought. It was heavily intertwined with the perceived physical, social, mental and moral evils associated with the industrialization and urbanisation of Britain. These evils were the driving force behind much of the N.E.C.C.’s attempted moral uplift. One aspect of this was the belief that people were no longer able to create their own leisure:

“The ‘machine age’ has resulted in the worker becoming more and more a

⁴⁵ Liverpool Council of Social Service, *The Flowing Tide*, 1 (2) (August 1938), 36. R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 39.

⁴⁶ N.C.S.S., *Partnership in Social effort: Annual Report, 1937-8*, 32.

⁴⁷ *Social Welfare* III (11) (July 1938), 192.

⁴⁸ Liverpool Council of Social Service, *The Liverpool Quarterly* 1 (2) (October 1932), 18-20.

cog in the machine, and the actual mental work being done by fewer people. ... We are in danger of completely forgetting how to enjoy ourselves, and many of us invariably demand some mechanical contrivance, wireless, 'talkies', the mechanical hare running around a track, etc., to enable us to pass away the hours without the necessity of using our mentality."⁴⁹

Human spirit, it was argued, was at risk of being submerged "by the cheap hopes and mean pleasures of the gramophone mind." Individual expression had to be rescued from "the tyranny of the mass."⁵⁰ This was not a concern solely restricted to the adults of the estate, for the human spirit of adolescents, "the future members of the Association," was considered equally, if not more, at risk.⁵¹ "Too many of the present day boys and girls," it was decried, "appear to divide their time between just hanging about and going to the pictures."⁵²

To rescue both the young and old from the dangers posed by the gramophone and cinema, and to prevent Britain becoming a "nation of mechanical robots," there was a desire for people to use their spare time in exercising and improving their minds. "Machine-made and spoon-fed entertainments and life and leisure activities" had no place within the new community.⁵³ Instead, social activity, recreation and leisure were to be "constructive for the enrichment of life."⁵⁴ Leisure was not to be a time of drift, but a "precious opportunity of cultural development."⁵⁵ Ernest Barker was an especially forceful, even fearful, proponent of this:

"I regard it as the function of a Community Association that its members should not only enjoy or amuse themselves, but should also develop their faculties and develop them in constructive and creative forms. ... Rise to the idea of something opposed to and transcending enjoyment and realize that leisure, after all, is work - work wherein and whereby you may realize your capacities."⁵⁶

On the new estates, there would be "community effort catering for the right use of leisure."⁵⁷ Indeed, the new estates provided the perfect opportunity for this:

⁴⁹ *Social Welfare* III (11) (July 1938), 191.

⁵⁰ British Association of Residential Settlements, 'Introduction' to *Annual Report: 1934-5*, no pagination.

⁵¹ N.C.S.S., *Voluntary Service: Annual Report 1932-3*, 26.

⁵² *Social Welfare* III (11) (July 1938), 192.

⁵³ *Social Service Review* XX (4) (April 1939), 149.

⁵⁴ N.C.S.S., *Co-operation in Social Service: Annual Report 1929-30*, 7-9.

⁵⁵ *Social Welfare* III (11) (July 1938), 190.

⁵⁶ *Social Service Review* XVIII (5) (May 1937), 73-80.

⁵⁷ *Community* I (1) Sept-Oct 1937, 4.

“In the absence of commercialized amusements there is the greater opportunity for self-development.”⁵⁸

Whereas in the old towns:

“Community activities were not so likely to arise spontaneously ... as the usual town amusements were within easier reach.”⁵⁹

The new type of leisure had two main forms. First, it was to be educational. Dramatic productions, for instance, were seen as enabling a range of educational activities:

“Dramatic work derives its greatest power from the fact that it disguises a valuable educative force in the dress of an entertainment.”⁶⁰

The production of a play would require, for instance, voice production, elocution, design of costumes, carpentry, construction and painting of scenery and stage properties, and a knowledge of the history of the play or of the time it portrayed. Similarly with musical work, both choral and instrumental, there could be endeavours to arrange any form of teaching or leadership that may be desired. Education in matters of health was to be promoted too. For instance, in addition to drama and musical productions, a Community Association would also be required to organise:

“A health week, health lectures and other forms of effort designed to raise the general level of knowledge on health matters.”⁶¹

Second, as the 1930s progressed, an increasing importance attached to health meant that if leisure was not to be educational - developing a healthy mind - then it could be physical - developing a healthy body. Undoubtedly, in a wider context, this was influenced by the growing consciousness of the threat posed by Germany and the contrast between the poor physical condition of the British working class and the physical “splendour of the generation of young Germans sent out by Nazi propaganda.” This consciousness culminated in the passing of the 1937 Physical Training and Recreation Act, and the establishment of the National Fitness Council within the Ministry of Health.⁶² Within the Community Association movement, however, it was also closely tied to notions of a healthy body leading to a healthy

⁵⁸ *Social Service Review* XI (5) (May 1930), 93-8.

⁵⁹ *Social Service Review* XVIII (5) (May 1937), 82.

⁶⁰ Liverpool Council of Social Service, *The Liverpool Quarterly* 4 (3) July 1936, 123-6.

⁶¹ *Social Service Review* XI (5) (May 1930), 93-8.

⁶² R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 36-7.

mind. Physical recreation was in a sense seen as not just a constructive use of leisure, but one which would facilitate *further* constructive uses of leisure, for “until bodily health has been won, the mind and spirit cannot fully thrive.”⁶³ As Ernest Barker put it:

“I want to see a gymnasium where ... our youngsters may develop sturdy and healthy bodies, and their elder brother and sisters - and indeed their parents too - may keep themselves fitter men and fitter women, fitter not only for their work, but fitter also for the better enjoyment of their leisure hours.”⁶⁴

The mere use of a gymnasium, however, was not the only form that this constructive use of recreation time through the development of a healthy body could encompass. Healthy activities could also be more closely tied to the antithesis of the evils of urbanisation and industrialisation: they could be associated with a return to the pleasures afforded by the countryside. Walking holidays, cycling tours, rambling and camping, for instance, were all encouraged:

“These can be far more healthy and interesting ... than the usual visits to over-crowded watering-places.”⁶⁵

Indeed, because “there can be nothing more important than the rising generation,” the National Council was a key institution in the formation of the National Association of Young Farmers’ Clubs and the Youth Hostels Association.⁶⁶

Back on the estates, however, there was a need for somewhere where the Community Association’s activities could take place and where the attempts to create the new community would be centred:

“The chance to develop a community sense ... is largely dependent on community buildings.”⁶⁷

“It is indeed increasingly clear that the sense of community must have practical expression, and is most happily focused in a building where the elements of a better community can meet and mix.”⁶⁸

This building was to be the Community Centre which, in the N.C.S.S.’s spirit of voluntary service, it defined simply “as a building which serves a community.”⁶⁹ At

⁶³ *Community I* (1) (September-October 1937), 11-3

⁶⁴ *Community I* (3) (January-February 1938), 85-7.

⁶⁵ *Social Service Review XI* (5) (May 1930), 93-8.

⁶⁶ N.C.S.S., *Voluntary Service Illustrated: Annual Report 1934-5*, 10. For a wider discussion, see D. Matless, ‘The Art of Right Living’, 93-122.

⁶⁷ N.C.S.S., *Voluntary Service: Annual Report 1933-4*, 37.

⁶⁸ N.C.S.S., *Voluntary Service Illustrated: Annual Report 1934-5*, 12.

⁶⁹ *Community I* (3) (January-February 1938), 85-7.

a more concrete level, however, the Community Centre would be for “the recreation of mind as well as body,” and it would “foster health and education together.”⁷⁰ This was reflected in both its interior and exterior design. Accommodation inside had to cater for the Association’s constructive recreational activities. There would be rooms for committee meetings and lectures, a hall for concerts and dramatic productions, and a common-room from which the “life of the centre would radiate.”⁷¹ Externally, the Centre - placed among “better homes and gardens set in wide, airy roads” - could not resemble anything from the old towns:⁷²

“It should be designed with great care and while it may be simple it must be beautiful. It is to stand for all that is fine in community life and an ugly building would ‘let down’ the ideal on which community is based.”⁷³

Although life on the estates was feared to be dull, therefore, the development of a sense of community, of improved community, did not rest on the provision of the sorts of leisure activities and opportunities for recreation that the tenants had enjoyed before they moved to the estates, but on the provision of constructive leisure activities. Moreover, these were to be constructive leisure activities organised by a Community Association with the benefit of ‘wise leadership’ from outside the estate:

“The aim of an Association should be the development of the better and fuller life of the community. ... This better and fuller life embraces all departments of activity. Though attention may primarily be devoted to the creative use of leisure time. ... In the Community Association, there are perhaps the beginnings of ... a new expression of community life ... based on the principle of constructive recreation.”⁷⁴

Constructive recreation was to be distinct from the commercialised, mechanical and demoralising amusements of the old town that were simply accepted without thinking. Leisure that was educational would promote a healthy mind. Leisure that was physical would promote a healthy body and a healthy mind, especially when it was associated with the rediscovery of the delights of the countryside. The Community Association, therefore, would both mould and supply the estate residents’ forms of leisure to create the new community, a new community uplifted from the immoral depths that the towns were wallowing in. Community along the

⁷⁰ *Social Service Review* XX (4) (April 1939), 143.

⁷¹ *Social Service Review* XI (5) (May 1930), 93-8.

⁷² N.C.S.S., *Voluntary Service: Annual Report 1933-4*, 37.

⁷³ *Social Service Review* XI (5) (May 1930), 93-8.

⁷⁴ *Community* I (3) (January-February 1938), 85-7.

best lines - created by the Community Association and reflected in the design of the Community Centre - was not merely to be a social community, but a moral community.

(iv) Moral Support.

I have already provided indications that the Community Association movement had some degree of Establishment support. Its leading light, the National Council, had been formed with a number of central and local government workers supporting its motives, for instance. There were other examples too. For the first fifteen years of the Council its Presidency was held by successive Speakers of the House of Commons. The Prince of Wales was also the Patron of the Council.⁷⁵ In spite of this its work on the cottage council estates through the N.E.C.C. was until the late 1930s largely unsupported, especially financially, by the official bodies of local and central government. By the end of the inter-war period, however, the ideals and activities of the Community Association movement were both funded and endorsed by the state. I now wish to detail how the N.E.C.C. came to wield such influence within discussions of community life upon the cottage council estates.

Until 1937 the N.E.C.C. had remained virtually without government funds in its pursuit of community on the new estates in general and its financing of the building of Community Centres in particular. Under the general provisions of the 1925 Housing Act and earlier statutes, local authorities did have some voluntary powers to provide buildings along the lines of community centres, and also equip them inside, for the use of the residents of the estates.⁷⁶ Typically, however, they chose not to place further burdens upon the ratepayers. As I have noted in Chapter Three of the London County Council, for instance, there was a general reluctance on behalf of the Housing Committee to spend further money on the estates having already built them at great expense. Funds from central government were not forthcoming either. Generally, therefore, the N.E.C.C. in its activities on the estates was forced to rely, as the B.A.R.S. and E.S.A. had first done on Becontree, upon the support of bodies such as the Carnegie Trustees.

With the passing of the Physical Training and Recreation Act (1937),

⁷⁵ M. Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 76 & 68.

⁷⁶ R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 37-8.

however, much of this changed. For the first time, money was now available from central government, via the local authorities, “to assist in the building of community centres as a contribution to physical fitness.”⁷⁷ As was noted above, this was undoubtedly inspired by thoughts of approaching conflict with Germany. A circular issued by the Board of Education in 1938 suggests that the Government was taking a rather broader view of the matter. Besides providing facilities for physical recreation, for instance, it advocated libraries, reading rooms and equipment for other hobbies.⁷⁸ However, whatever the underlying reason:

“One of the consequences was an arousal of interest among local government bodies not yet familiarised with the community association and community centre ideas.”⁷⁹

Moreover, the wider aims of the N.E.C.C., the “place of community centres in the physical planning of housing,” was also endorsed by the Ministry of Health with the publication of the 1938 C.H.A.C. Report.⁸⁰ Commenting upon the management of the cottage council estates, and carrying the authoritative weight of Raymond Unwin amongst others, it showered the Community Association movement with praise and advocated many of its ideas. In particular, under the heading of ‘Community Services’, it was argued that the estates should not be viewed merely as a collection of houses to shelter their residents, for the “spiritual, social and recreational needs of that population must also be met.”

“Their search will be for a social background and the evolution of a new tradition. Such matters are more of the spirit than of the flesh. ... Yet local authorities can do a great deal to assist the development of the communal and social interests most needed to create that social background and tradition.”

The “valuable service rendered in this connection by the National Council for [*sic*] Social Service through its Community Centres and Associations Committee,” was noted, and the local authorities were urged to build Community Centres:

“It is, we think, of first importance that every local authority whose proposals involve the building of a large number of houses on one site should so arrange the lay-out as to leave a site on which a community centre may ultimately be provided.”

⁷⁷ R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 37.

⁷⁸ Circular 1462 of 10.6.38. Quoted in R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 37.

⁷⁹ R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 37.

⁸⁰ R. Clarke (Ed.), *Enterprising Neighbours*, 38. C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*. P.R.O. file HLG 37/14.

The Community Centres were to include assembly halls, adequate club rooms, workshops for instruction in handicrafts, libraries and gymnasia. Moreover, these activities should be “organised and run by persons who are really qualified by experience to undertake this important work.”⁸¹ As the N.C.S.S. Annual Report noted, the C.H.A.C. Report was “a testimony to the significance which is attached to the movement by responsible authorities.”⁸² As Walter Elliot, the Minister of Health, said to the Community Centres Conference in April 1939:

“Community Centres represent what may be called the marriage of Health with Education - in the widest sense of both terms - a match in which the Minister takes a very lively interest. ... The Government has recognised the importance of this movement.”⁸³

By the time of the outbreak of World War II, therefore, interest in the Community Association movement had greatly increased. In 1935 six local authorities had attended the annual conference of the N.E.C.C.⁸⁴ In 1939 the regional and national conferences held by the Community Centres and Associations Committee were attended by representatives of one hundred and seventy local authorities. There was a:

“Growing sense of partnership between the Associations ... and the Local Authorities who will in most cases be responsible for the building.”⁸⁵

(v) *Conclusion.*

To the N.E.C.C., therefore, community was not so much bound up with forms of social activity as it was concerned with morality. Although the new estates were presented as having no sense of community, the ideal of community that was missing was a moral community. It was the aim of the N.E.C.C. to create an improved way of life on the estates. This was a way of life that was an improvement upon the life of the old towns that were perceived as in the last stages of moral decay. The new estates offered them hope, however. They were seen as virgin territory, a place to start afresh and build a new ideal of community. This

⁸¹ C.H.A.C., *Report upon the Management of Housing Estates in the Ownership of Local Authorities*, 51-3. P.R.O. file HLG 37 14.

⁸² N.C.S.S., *Partnership in Social Effort: Annual Report 1938-9*, 42.

⁸³ *Social Service Review* XX (4) (April 1939), 142, 144.

⁸⁴ R. Clarke, *Enterprising Neighbours*, 40.

⁸⁵ N.C.S.S., *Partnership in Social Effort: Annual Report 1938-9*, 42.

was an ideal of community built upon morality. It was to be achieved by establishing Community Associations on the estates. These Associations would be overarching bodies for they would federate all the groups and residents on the estate together. The leaders of the Associations, it needs to be stressed, were not residents of the estates, but wise leaders experienced in promoting morally uplifting social and educational activities. This was the basis of the new ideal of community. There was no place in this new community for pure, unabashed amusement - that was considered demoralizing. Leisure had to be constructive, it was even described as work. This leisure took two main forms. It had to be educational - for a healthy mind - or it had to be physical - for a healthy body as well as a healthy mind. If the leisure could be associated with the neglected pleasures of the countryside as opposed to the evils of the commercialized and mechanical amusements of the town, then all the better. A centre - a Community Centre - would provide the focus for these activities. As Figure 6.1 suggests, in addition to activities such as rambling, drama, and keep-fit the Association would also house at its Centre groups such as the Garden Guild and the British Legion. Political parties, it will be noted, were not included within this schematic representation of the N.E.C.C.'s model for community. The local authority was, however. The N.E.C.C. would co-operate with the local authority, the local voluntary organisations and the residents and organisations of the estates to realise the model of community.

From the very outset of the Community Association movement, however, the N.E.C.C. had been aware that local conditions would have to be taken into account wherever it attempted to create a new moral community:

“Local circumstances must determine the order in which these tasks are undertaken and the exact shape they should take in any particular area.”⁸⁶

The next two sections of this chapter examine these local circumstances on the Roehampton and Watling estates. On both estates, I argue, the N.E.C.C. and its cohort of moral guardians encountered difficulties when it attempted to implement its model (of) community. On Roehampton it failed to establish a Community Association. On Watling it did establish an Association, but the particular local circumstances of the estate ensured that the model community was not realised.

⁸⁶ Community Work In New Housing Estates. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/27. See also *Social Service Review* X (12) (December 1929), 252-4.

C. Roehampton: Time Gentlemen, Please.

“It will probably be necessary for considerable discussions to take place to ensure that the Community Association which results from the present Tenants’ Association is placed on a sound basis.”⁸⁷

I have described in the previous chapter the moral overtones of improvement and respectability that co-existed alongside the R.E.T.A.’s ideal of community through horizontal social connections between the tenants. In the work of the R.E.T.A. there was an emphasis on ‘uplift’ by means of education. Further, the Association was permeated by the Garden Suburb ideal and a desire for village life. The social theory of community of the R.E.T.A. was intertwined with the ideal of a community that would be different from the crowded and decaying areas of inner London that the residents had left behind. Implicit in the notions of uplift, the Garden Suburb and a village ‘feel’ to the estate was a new and better way of life - morally, socially and physically. There was, I suggest, a marked similarity between these aspects of the R.E.T.A.’s ideal of community and that held by the Community Association movement described in the previous section.

However, I have also pointed out, without yet making much of it, that after 1932 the middle-class founders of the Association were fast disappearing from Roehampton. At the same time the moral emphasis to the Association’s work came to an end and it began to concentrate primarily upon social activities and providing a drinking place. A social community guided by morals gradually lost those morals. At this point the Community Association movement stepped in on Roehampton to recreate the new way of life and the new moral community which had previously been promoted by the R.E.T.A. Working through the London Council of Social Service [L.C.S.S.] it began to attempt to redeem the souls that had strayed from the path of moral righteousness and who, by 1936, could be found propping up the bar of the R.E.T.A. Club.

In pursuit of this those desiring a Community Centre on the estate were initially given hope by the L.C.C. who decided not to renew the lease of Putney Park House with permission for a bar. Without the income from this the R.E.T.A. would not be able to continue its activities. This enabled the L.C.S.S. to present themselves as able to provide a centre for the residents of Roehampton. The

⁸⁷ Note on Roehampton in a report to the London Council of Social Service, “New Estates Situation Report, October 1937.” G.L.R.O. file ACC 1888 85.

Tenants' Association, however, refused to accept this, and by establishing activities to promote the physical and cultural development of the estate's residents it managed to convince the L.C.C. to change its mind. Despairing of any attempt at moral uplift within the proximity of a bar the Community Association movement retreated to the shadows. In the case of Roehampton, it is argued, therefore, that the Community Association movement failed in its aims of promoting its model community. The R.E.T.A. showed that the L.C.S.S., the local incarnation of the N.E.C.C., had no monopoly over morality. Moreover, the morality of the L.C.S.S. and N.E.C.C. simply was not welcome.

(i) A Bar And A Billiard Table.

The attention of Wyndham Deedes was first drawn to the Roehampton estate in early 1936 when the Rev. Hubert Stephenson, of Putney Presbyterian Church, and Mrs. M. Sassoon called at his office at the London Council of Social Service.⁸⁸ Rev. Stephenson was Chairman of the Huntingfield Road School Care Committee. Mrs. Sassoon was the Honorary Secretary of the Committee and also one of the School Managers. Neither of them were tenants of Roehampton.⁸⁹ Their topic of discussion was the R.E.T.A. and Putney Park House. Putney Park House, Deedes was informed, had been let to the R.E.T.A. for over ten years and they rented out rooms in the building to the British Legion and the Boy Scouts. However, in the view of Mrs. Sassoon and Rev. Stephenson:

"In many ways the house is not used as, nor in its present condition is it suitable for, a Community Centre."

The Tenants' Association, they explained, had "a large and prominent bar as well as a billiard table." Indeed, the activities of the Association were "reported to be entirely of the amusement variety." Here was work for the Community Association movement.

Although neither Mrs. Sassoon nor Rev. Stephenson had approached the R.E.T.A. they were interested in "the possibility of moving the L.C.C. in the

⁸⁸ Note to Wyndham Deedes, 2.3.36. G.L.R.O. file ACC 1888/75.

⁸⁹ "Roehampton estate - Community Centre". Note of interview on 24.9.36 by Chairman of Housing and Public Health Committee with Mrs. Sassoon and Rev. H. Stephenson. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN1/26; and Letter from Mrs. M. Sassoon to Silkin (Chairman of Housing and Public Health Committee), 31.8.36. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/26.

direction of a Community Centre" there. They had been in touch with their local L.C.C. member and also with Mr. Tom Jones, a Labour member of the L.C.C. who was "interested in community work." It was their initial intention:

"To press for the erection by the L.C.C. of a youth Community Centre in the grounds of Putney Park House."⁹⁰

This they did. After their visit to Deedes' office they met with Mr. Silkin, the Chairman of the Housing and Public Health Committee, with "regard to building a Community centre on the Dover House Estate at Roehampton."

By August 1936 they had formed a Committee to implement their plans and had approached the R.E.T.A. In a fashion that was not atypical of the Community Association movement, they had explained to the Tenants' Association a plan to build a purpose-designed Community Centre. Preferably this would be "on the site of the present Putney Park House, which is ... unsuitable for a community centre from every possible point of view."⁹¹ In particular, it was considered by Mrs. Sassoon as unsuitable for juvenile activities. In line with the policy of the N.E.C.C., the Centre would be run by present members of the Tenants' Association together with "local people on and around the estate." Funds would be forthcoming from the National Council of Social Service.⁹² The R.E.T.A. Committee were said to be "strongly in favour of the scheme." There was to be a mass meeting of the estate's tenants at the end of September to consider the matter.⁹³

One point that had not yet been mentioned to the R.E.T.A., however, was that the L.C.C. would not consider renewing the lease for the site with the inclusion of a bar there when it expired in 1938.⁹⁴ Whether or not this was suggested by Rev. Stephenson or Mrs. Sassoon in their meetings with the L.C.C. is not clear. It would appear very likely, however, for later correspondence between those promoting the ideal of a Community Association on Roehampton stressed that it was undesirable

⁹⁰ Note to Wyndham Deedes, 2.3.36. G.L.R.O. file ACC 1888/75.

⁹¹ Letter from Mrs. M. Sassoon to Silkin (Chairman of Housing and Public Health Committee), 31.8.36. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

⁹² "Roehampton estate - Community Centre". Note of interview on 24.9.36 by Chairman of Housing and Public Health Committee with Mrs. Sassoon and Rev. H. Stephenson. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1 26.

⁹³ Letter from Mrs. M. Sassoon to Silkin (Chairman of Housing and Public Health Committee), 31.8.36. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

⁹⁴ "Roehampton estate - Community Centre". Note of interview on 24.9.36 by Chairman of Housing and Public Health Committee with Mrs. Sassoon and Rev. H. Stephenson. G.L.R.O.

for a bar to feature in any of their plans:

“The accommodation available at the Club is not, at present, suitable for physical training, and, even if it were capable of adaptation, educational opinion is agreed that children and adolescents should not be exposed to the atmosphere of the Club.”⁹⁵

“The general consensus of opinion among community associations appears to be against the possession of a licence and, in particular, that all youth organisations are most emphatic that there should be no licence in a centre, unless the youth section of the centre is entirely separate from the section where intoxicants are sold.”⁹⁶

In line with the ideals of the Community Association movement, drinking and the physical and moral improvement of youth were totally incompatible.

At the meeting of the estate’s tenants, the details of the scheme were announced. Amongst the moral guardians of society representing the Community Association movement were Mrs. Sassoon, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Fraser, General Sangster, Rev. Stephenson, Rev. Wallis and Rev. Father Kimble. Agreement for co-operation appeared to be reached. This is, at least, until it was pointed out that the L.C.C. had decided that a bar would not be allowed. Discussion was now “aroused” and the Community Association was not formed.⁹⁷

The N.E.C.C. did attempt to show that Putney Park House could theoretically be run as the Centre for a profitable Community Association without the necessity for a bar.⁹⁸ However, the prospect of losing the bar was of more concern to the R.E.T.A. As was later explained to the tenants:

“That which had stood the tenants in good stead for 15 years; that of their own creation, meeting their own needs could not be allowed to be wiped out with the stroke of a pen.”⁹⁹

There was now considerably more correspondence between the Tenants’ Association and the Council than there had been for several years. Three times they wrote to the

file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

⁹⁵ Letter from P.W. Herapath (Head, Hotham Road General Evening Institute) to the Education Officer, 14.7.38. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

⁹⁶ “Physical Training and Recreation Act, 1937 - Community Centres - Roehampton Estate - Putney Park House.” Report by the Education Officer, 19.1.39. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

⁹⁷ *Richmond Herald*, 3.10.36., 24.

⁹⁸ Letter from E. Sandford Carter (Assistant Secretary of N.E.C.C.) to Mrs. M. Sassoon, 27.10.36. G.L.R.O. file ACC 1888 75.

⁹⁹ R.E.T.A.’s Fourteenth Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 29.3.38. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/26.

L.C.C. asking for a statement of the Council's position on the matter.¹⁰⁰ In March 1937, Frank Hunt confirmed that any extension to the lease would "be subject to a condition prohibiting an application for the sale of excisable liquors."¹⁰¹

The strength of feeling of the R.E.T.A. on the issue, however, was such that they employed a firm of solicitors to renegotiate the lease. The social necessity of Putney Park House - 'the Club' - to the tenants of Roehampton was stressed to the Council:

The Club is really the Social centre of the Roehampton Estate. ... Childrens parties, Whist Drives, Bazaars, etc., are held there."¹⁰²

The L.C.C.'s response, however, was that the lease would still only be renewed with clauses banning drink.¹⁰³ The R.E.T.A., therefore, devised other plans to convince the Council of the need for their presence on the estate. By the end of May, J.J. Connors, an L.C.C. schoolmaster, took over the position of R.E.T.A. Honorary Secretary and somewhat astutely changed tack a little to elicit L.C.C. support for the R.E.T.A.'s activities.¹⁰⁴ Rather than emphasising the social side of the Association's activities, it was now announced to the tenants of Roehampton that the R.E.T.A.'s amenities were of "interest to your physical and cultural welfare." The most notable addition to the Association's activities was, in tune with the spirit then prevailing throughout the country, the promotion of physical fitness. There was also the establishment of educational film displays for children.¹⁰⁵ These new aspects of the R.E.T.A. were stressed to the L.C.C., as were renovations of Putney Park House and its grounds. The R.E.T.A., Connors argued, was now "functioning as an 'Estate Club' proper." He hoped the L.C.C. would consider this when the renewal of the lease for Putney Park House was due.¹⁰⁶ They appeared not to, reiterating that the

¹⁰⁰ Letters from W.L. Wood (R.E.T.A. hon. sec.) to F. Hunt, 1.10.36., 8.10.36, 11.3.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

¹⁰¹ Letter from F. Hunt to W.L. Wood, 15.3.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

¹⁰² Letter from H.C. Hanne & Co. to the L.C.C. Solicitor, 4.5.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

¹⁰³ Letter from L.C.C. Solicitor to Hanne & Co., 14.5.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1 26.

¹⁰⁴ Superintendent's Report on Putney Park House and the R.E.T.A., 8.9.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1 26.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from J.J. Connors to estate tenants, 31.5.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/26.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from J.J. Connors to Valuer, 4.6.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

lease would not be renewed on its old terms.¹⁰⁷

A few days after the R.E.T.A. had been informed of this Rev. Stephenson continued to pursue his aim of a Community Association. He visited Putney Park House to see what the R.E.T.A.'s plans were going to be if, as he undoubtedly hoped, the L.C.C. adhered to its decision not to allow the bar. He had to admit that he was impressed by what Connors had achieved:

“Connors is a dynamic gentleman. ... Since his appointment he seems to have acted with great energy and started a number of activities. To H, the British Legion and the Boy Scouts have their headquarters in the building, and a form of Boys' Club providing boxing, swimming, etc., was, I understood, being inaugurated. In fact, a form of Community Association already exists.”

It was, however, only a form of a Community Association. One aspect that concerned Rev. Stephenson was the absence of an external influence upon the Tenants' Association. It was his view, as it was the view of the national Community Association movement, that the R.E.T.A. could only become a Community Association if it was “extended to include all groups and activities in the district.” Moreover, he was troubled by the amount of interest in the bar and other uncreative pursuits. Of the “fair number of people” in Putney Park House when he visited, the majority, he noted “were to be found in the Bar and in the rooms set aside for billiards and darts.” He explained to Connors that if the bar was not allowed and the R.E.T.A. chose to include all the other organisations and activities in the area - if it became a Community Association - then it might be possible to rent Putney Park House for a much lower rent than previously. Connors, however, rejected the idea. He was still “most anxious that the Licence should be renewed.” Any further developments in the plan for the Community Association were considered “unlikely until the question of the renewal of the Licence has been decided.”¹⁰⁸

Connors certainly was most anxious for the bar to remain in Putney Park House. The Association's solicitors wrote to the Council again:

“We are instructed that should the Council not grant a new lease on the same terms as the previous lease, the Club will have to be wound up. If that is

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Westwood (L.C.C.) to J.J. Connors, 12.6.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

¹⁰⁸ L.C.S.S. Memorandum of June 1937: “Putney Park House (Roehampton Tenants' Association).” G.L.R.O. file ACC 1888 75.

done, it will be a great loss to the whole of the district.”¹⁰⁹

It was at this point that the Valuer asked the Roehampton Superintendent for a report upon Putney Park House and the R.E.T.A. As shown in the previous chapter, it was damning in its condemnation of the deterioration he had witnessed in both the building and its grounds and the Association. Of Connors’ recent efforts, however, he was more praiseworthy:

“He appears to be a very active man (if it lasts) who has certainly pulled the club together to some extent. He has gone out more to interest the younger people. ... The new Secretary has had two rooms in the house redecorated and is making some effort to improve the tennis courts.”¹¹⁰

On the basis of this the Valuer suggested to the Housing and Public Health Committee that they renew the lease to Putney Park House on its old terms - with the inclusion of the bar. Connors and the R.E.T.A., he noted, were “undoubtedly endeavouring to further the interests of tenants on the cultural and juvenile sides of its work.”¹¹¹ In October 1937 the Committee did so.¹¹² Back at the L.C.S.S., they could only lament their lost opportunity to develop their ideal of community:

“Unfortunately, the licensed club which it was hoped might become the Centre has had an extension of the license for a further three years.”¹¹³

The R.E.T.A. continues its own ideal of community to this day.

(ii) Conclusion.

In the case of Roehampton, then, it can be seen that the influence of the Community Association movement was negligible. For several years after the formation of the N.E.C.C. and the promotion of the need for a moral community on the new estates, it paid no attention to the first estate to be built by the L.C.C. after the war. It had, I argue, no need to. The middle-class residents of the estate had already designed their own moral and respectable community. Although there was perhaps less emphasis on the need for constructive leisure pursuits than the N.E.C.C. promoted at the national level, there were compensations. Education and uplift were

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Hanne & Co. to Clerk of LCC, 27.8.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/26.

¹¹⁰ Superintendent’s Report on Putney Park House and the RETA, 8.9.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/26.

¹¹¹ Report of the Valuer to the Housing and Public Health Committee, 20.10.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/26.

¹¹² Letter from Westwood to J.J. Connors, 23.10.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1 26.

¹¹³ Note to Wyndham Deedes from Harold Smith, 23.2.38. G.L.R.O. file ACC 1888/75.

a central feature of the work of the R.E.T.A.'s Club and Institute: the Garden Suburb ideal was promoted; the Association also wanted to develop the feel of a village. This, I have stressed, was the antithesis of the London that the residents of Roehampton had left behind. They were not perhaps creating a new England, but they were developing the estate as the epitome of England.

By 1932, however, these local visionaries were disappearing. The carefully defined morality of the community they had sought to develop went with them. The social community of the R.E.T.A. which had co-existed alongside the moral community was left to stand precariously - in view of the lack of support it received from the estate's residents - on its own two feet. The moral virtues of the early residents of the estate and the founders of the R.E.T.A. had been such that the L.C.C. had relaxed its usual policy of prohibiting drinking on tenants' premises on its estates. They could be relied upon to use the bar for purely rational enjoyment and as an adjunct to their games of tennis. Later members of the R.E.T.A., however, were less interested in tennis. They were less interested in tending the gardens of Putney Park House. They did not want to play clock golf either. They do appear, however, to have liked drinking and playing billiards.

This was not the new way of life that the N.E.C.C. and its band of moral guardians had planned for the new estates. They did not wish to imagine Boy Scouts hiking through a crowded, smoke-filled bar. Instead, the Community Association movement sought to create a new community of moral worth upon Roehampton. They had plans to demolish the sordid and unsuitable Putney Park House and construct the Centre of their Community in its place. The tenants welcomed this, until they discovered there was no place for a drink in the discourse of community promoted by the N.E.C.C. As a result they repeatedly rejected it. True, they were willing to uplift themselves by inaugurating juvenile film shows and joining in the rush for physical fitness sweeping Britain in the approach to World War II. In doing so they can be seen to have borrowed the moral discourse of the N.E.C.C. in an attempt to use it to convince the L.C.C. Still, however, they wanted to drink. They were not willing to surrender their social community in exchange for a purely moral one.

A central feature in the successful resistance of the R.E.T.A. to the morality

of the Community Association movement was that they had their own meeting place and were able to keep it. They had no need to rely on the efforts of outsiders to provide a centre for them. In the next section, I turn my attention to Watling. The W.R.A., as I showed in the previous chapter, did not have a meeting place. This was to enable the N.E.C.C. to establish a Community Association on the estate. However, the local context of Watling was still to prevent the imposition of the N.E.C.C. model of community.

D. Watling: Community And Communists.

The preceeding part of this chapter has shown the attempts of the Community Association movement to promote their ideal of community on Roehampton. Although their attempts failed, the morality of their community in contrast to the social community of the residents was clearly evident. Also evident was their concern to impose their version upon the estate's residents. I now wish to detail the case of Watling. Here the N.E.C.C. were successful in establishing both a Community Association, known as the Watling Association, and a Community Centre.

I begin by showing the process by which the Association was established by the N.E.C.C. and stress that the guiding forces instrumental in its formation lay outside of the estate, involving neither Watling's residents nor its Residents' Association. Instead it was a part of the wider, national Community Association movement's activities. Its aims did not correspond with those of the W.R.A. either, concentrating as it did on uplifting educational affairs rather than social ones. Although the W.R.A. differed in its objectives from the Watling Association, however, it did, after some resistance, agree to co-operate with the external body. I argue that it did so in the hope of obtaining its much desired hall. This was an area in which the L.C.C. were of help to the Community Association movement.

Once co-operation had been agreed, the W.R.A. was transformed in line with the N.E.C.C.'s model for a Community Association. This meant the involvement of those from outside the estate who held the N.E.C.C.'s ideals and the process of federation with other organisations upon the estate. A Community Centre was also

built according to plan. Within all of this the ideals of the new moral community, I argue, were promoted. It is stressed that the Watling Association had little time for ordinary social activities such as dances and whist drives, but rather placed much emphasis upon the moralising activities that the N.E.C.C. sought to promote at the national level. Amongst the activities favoured by the Association, for instance, were drama, education, and healthy outdoor activities. These were activities for the new community, in which women, I argue, were once again structurally disadvantaged.

It is argued, however, that the N.E.C.C.'s attempt to build the new moral England was subjected to varying tensions at the local level on Watling. These tensions led to the distortion of its model for the new community. A central feature of this, I argue, was the presence and activities of the Communists upon the estate. In much the same way as they had attempted to use the W.R.A. as a vehicle for their aims and activities, they also attempted to subvert the Watling Association for their own uses. This was not the sort of federation the N.E.C.C. had expected and the Party's uses of the local Association - holding, for example, a Communist Sunday School in the Community Centre - were clearly directed at an ideal of community that contrasted to the sanitised and moralised one propounded by the N.E.C.C.

Although the Communists may have ultimately been unsuccessful in their aims, their actions were an enduring legacy, causing further local divergences on Watling from the N.E.C.C.'s community ideal. Their presence was sufficient to ensure that two of the most significant organisations upon the estate refused to affiliate with the Community Association. In the more popular mind also, the very ideal of the Community Association became associated with Communism, prompting residents to pay little attention to the Association. There were other failures of the N.E.C.C. plan too. Relations with the local authority, although initially harmonious, deteriorated when the Association sought to promote the interests of Watling's residents. Rather than co-operate with the Watling Association, the L.C.C. considered controlling it. Further, another of the largest organisations on Watling, the gardening society, refused to countenance joining the Community Association for it simply saw no reason to. Moreover, it is stressed that the Association received minimal support from the wider population of Watling.

This was not just because of the Communist involvement, but because it did not cater for their interests. The residents simply rejected the moralising pursuits of the N.E.C.C.'s ideal for the new community. There was, I argue, little recognition of a moral aspect within the ideals of community of the people of Watling.

(i) *"Learn The Community Spirit Now!"*¹¹⁴

"Clearly we must all co-operate to make a success of Watling, to develop a community of which we may be proud in every way, to make the most of the opportunities which have been given us, to play our part in building the new England."¹¹⁵

In this section I wish to trace the development of the Watling Association, the estate's Community Association. The Watling Association, it is stressed, did not originate on the estate. It was born in the offices of the B.A.R.S. and then nurtured in those of the N.E.C.C. It was envisaged as part of, and guided by, the national Community Association movement. Its early growth involved neither the residents nor the Residents' Association of Watling, and the ideal of community it promoted was not that of the W.R.A., whom it sought to transform into its own image. The W.R.A.'s desire for a hall, however, was an incentive offered by the N.E.C.C. and ultimately accepted, leading to the promotion of the moral community of the new England. Watling was to be moulded into a community based not upon fellowship between residents arising from ordinary social activities, but through the moral improvement of its tenants. Rather than listening to the gramophone, going to the cinema or drinking in the pub, the residents of Watling were urged to use their leisure time constructively and healthily. They would perform dramas, educate themselves to be good citizens, and sunbathe naked to improve their body as well as soul.

The initial expressions of interest in Watling from the Community Association movement came in early 1929 from Wyndham Deedes, then the Honorary Secretary of the B.A.R.S. According to Deedes' secretary, Miss B. Murray, he was "strenuously following up the idea of doing something" there. For the purposes of this something, the L.C.C. were informed, he wanted first refusal on an old farm house that the L.C.C. had left standing on the estate, Orange Hill

¹¹⁴ *The Watling Resident* 2 (10) (March 1930), 14.

¹¹⁵ *The Watling Resident* 4 (5) (September 1931), 2.

House.¹¹⁶ Events then progressed rapidly. At the beginning of March a meeting was arranged at a private house in Hendon to which a “number of people interested in the Social and Educational welfare of the Watling Housing Estate” were invited. They were “well-to-do people in that neighbourhood”, local employers, Councillors, Members of Parliament and clergy of all denominations. The purpose of Deedes’ something would be discussed amongst them:

“It is proposed that I should explain what is meant by a Settlement or Community Centre, and lay it down as a sine qua non of starting one, that all who engage in social welfare work at Watling should agree to co-operate.”¹¹⁷

At this stage support from the L.C.C. was most forthcoming. As has been mentioned in the previous two chapters, there was a definite concern on behalf of the Council that its tenants should be ‘trained’ into a new way of life in the estates. Although it was never referred to in terms of any ideal of community, the tenants were subjected to an intensive system of management, ranging from the proper cultivation of their gardens to instructions on how to flush their toilets. Ronald Payne’s view of his job reflected this: “We were called ‘nannies’ you see in the original concept of the job.”¹¹⁸ As E.M. Dence, the Chairman of the Housing Committee, put it there was “ample scope ... for the physical and mental uplifting and development” of the estate’s residents. He too had considered the possibility of Orange Hill House being used for the purposes Deedes was considering and was willing, therefore, to let the premises at a “reasonable” rent.¹¹⁹ In a further instance of such support, the L.C.C. Valuer, Frank Hunt, represented the Council at the meeting.¹²⁰

No firm decisions were made at the meeting except the formation of a Watling Committee “to further examine the situation.”¹²¹ At a second meeting at the end of the month, however, the suggestion that the B.A.R.S. should start work in Watling was “heartily” approved. To this end, the Watling Association [W.A.] was

¹¹⁶ Letter from Miss B. Murray to F. Hunt, 18.1.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to C.B. Levita, 20.2.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Mr. Payne.

¹¹⁹ Letter from E.M. Dence to L.H. Oliver (of County Hall), 27.2.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1 27.

¹² Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F.Hunt, 5.3.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹²¹ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F.Hunt, 5.3.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

now formed, its members being those who had attended the two meetings.¹²²

It was, however, something of a misnomer. Although Deedes saw the main purpose of the Community Centre being “to secure co-operation all round,” he had as yet neglected to co-operate with the people of Watling.¹²³ The Association’s members were more the moral guardians of society than residents of Watling. Besides Deedes and his secretary, other W.A. members at this time included Captain Lionel Ellis of the N.C.S.S., H. Fleming of the E.S.A, John Laing of the Plymouth Brethren and Mr. Brightman of the Union of Churches.¹²⁴ Later additions would include Thomas Hancock Nunn of the London Council of Social Service, Mr. Cutherbertson (the Hendon Education Officer) and Mr. Walker (the Hendon Chief Librarian).¹²⁵ True, there were also three residents of Watling. Two of these, however, were Mrs. Copinger and Rev. Copinger,¹²⁶ and his moral fears that the “evils of drinking and overcrowding”, evils abounding in London, were present on the estate had already been made clear to the L.C.C. through private correspondence.¹²⁷ The only L.C.C. tenant from Watling represented within the Watling Association was Mr. T. Pugh, later to become a Labour Councillor for the estate (see Chapter Four). For the time being, however, he had to be content with the quasi-public position of Chairman of the W.A.¹²⁸ It was to this Committee that the L.C.C. offered the lease of Orange Hill House at a rent of £250 a year, “for the establishment of a community centre.”¹²⁹

It should be stressed that the Watling Residents’ Association was also initially excluded. Although Rev. Copinger was President of the W.R.A. and Pugh one of its Committee members, it was not until June, three months after the formation of the W.A., that the other officers of the Residents’ Association learnt

¹²² Letter from Wyndham Deedes to members of the Watling Committee, 26.3.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/27.

¹²³ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 6.8.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹²⁴ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 8.5.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27. R. Coad, *Laing: The Biography of Sir John W. Laing, C.B.E. (1879-1978)* (London, 1979).

¹²⁵ Minutes of the third meeting of the Watling Association, 6.12.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹²⁶ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 8.5.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹²⁷ Letter from Rev. Copinger to W.J. Berry, 5.7.28. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹²⁸ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 8.5.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹²⁹ Letter from F. Hunt to Wyndham Deedes, 14.6.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1 27.

“with some surprise” of its existence.¹³⁰ Precisely how the W.R.A. found out about the Watling Association is unclear. What is clear, however, is that, in the words of Deedes, they were “a little apprehensive” about what the activities of the W.A. were going to be.¹³¹ Frustrated by the ‘rabid temperance reformers’ of the L.C.C. in their attempts to finance a club house with the help of a brewer, the Residents’ Association had instead begun to consider borrowing money from a bank. To repay the money, they had already begun to organise a series of fundraising events that would be spread over seven days, to be known as Watling Week.¹³² Although they believed they had first option on the lease of Orange Hill House, they were tending more towards the idea of building a club house in stages on another site within Watling that the Council had indicated was available.¹³³ One thing they did not want was any competition. Between the W.R.A. and the W.A., there was, as Deedes put it, an unfortunate “contretemps”.¹³⁴

To enlist the support of the W.R.A., therefore, the Watling Association arranged a first meeting of representatives from both bodies for the end of July. If anything, however, the meeting merely demonstrated the gulf separating the values and aims of the two Associations. Deedes spoke on behalf of the N.E.C.C. and its local manifestation, the Watling Association. Their first objective, he argued, was to ensure that the organisation of “social and educational activities were co-ordinated.” To this end it was felt:

“That if possible a ‘Watling Community Association’ representative of existing and prospective Organisations and Societies should be formed.”

An important step in this “would be the acquisition of some centre common to all, to be called the Community Centre.” They had Orange Hill House in mind for this and the L.C.C. were willing to lease or sell it to them. Orange Hill House was not to be

¹³⁰ Minutes of the joint meeting held at the house of Mr. Brett James between representatives of the Watling Tenants [sic] Association and of the Watling Association, 30.6.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹³¹ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 6.8.29. G.L.R.O. file LC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹³² *The Watling Resident* 2 (4) (August 1929), 16; Minutes of the joint meeting held at the house of Mr. Brett James between representatives of the Watling Tenants [sic] Association and of the Watling Association, 30.6.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27; and Letter from H.G. Rowley (W.R.A. Hon. Sec.) to the Secretary of the Parks and Open Spaces Committee, 11.9.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1 27.

¹³³ *The Watling Resident* 2 (4) (August 1929), 16. Minutes of the joint meeting held at the house of Mr. Brett James between representatives of the Watling Tenants [sic] Association and of the Watling Association, 30.6.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

a “Club Centre”, however. Rather, it would be:

“The organising centre for activities such as Art, Music, Drama and informal but grant earning educational classes, Lectures etc. ... There would be tea rooms: and the grounds of the estate would be open for the pleasure of the Community.”

It was hoped that it would also contain a library, and that it would be controlled by a “Committee elected by the Watling Community Association.” H.G. Rowley then put the point of view of the W.R.A. It was a simple but strongly contrasting view. Not merely had the Residents’ Association come to the conclusion that the erection of “their own Hall” was preferable, they also “felt it necessary in the first instance to restrict themselves to purely social activities.” From the outset, therefore, it was evident that the social aims of the W.R.A. did not correspond with the educational and morally worthy aims of their counterparts from outside the estate who were guided by aims devised at the national level.

For the remainder of the meeting this division between the two Associations remained. Although Deedes argued that “the Community as a whole would stand to gain” by the Watling Association’s acquisition of Orange Hill House, Rowley still expressed his preference for the Residents’ Association scheme. Both Pugh and Rev. Copinger did try, with some imagination, to bridge the gap:

“Mr. [*sic*] Copinger expressed his pleasure that there had emerged so broad a basis of understanding and so clear a desire between all to co-operate. ... The Chairman [Pugh] summed up the situation as follows: It was clear he said that there was practical unanimity as to aims and a clear desire to work together.”¹³⁵

Their efforts were unsuccessful, however, for during the next two months, the Watling Association encountered “considerable opposition” from the Residents’ Association over their proposals for Orange Hill House.¹³⁶ So much so, that in October they were abandoned in view of the failure “to secure the co-operation of all interested parties on the Estate.”¹³⁷ As Deedes explained to the L.C.C. Valuer, in

¹³⁴ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 6.8.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹³⁵ Minutes of the joint meeting held at the house of Mr. Brett James between representatives of the Watling Tenants [*sic*] Association and of the Watling Association, 30.6.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/27.

¹³⁶ Memorandum to the Valuer: Notes of an interview at the County Hall between the Clerk to the Council and the Valuer’s representative (Mr. Groves) and Sir Wyndham Deedes, Miss Murray, Miss Lee (in charge of Becontree settlement work), and Mr. Fleming (E.S.A. Secretary), 16.9.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/27.

¹³⁷ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 7.10.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/27.

contrast to his activities on the Becontree and Downham estates, progress on Watling owing to “local complications has proved the least easy.”¹³⁸

Help, however, was forthcoming from Mr. Hunt. He was appreciative of the local complications Deedes was facing:

“Having had some years of experience of the elements found on the Council’s Housing Estates, and especially on the Watling Estate, I am not surprised to hear of the difficulties that you are encountering in your work.”

Of more significance, however, he informed Deedes that the W.R.A. had no option on Orange Hill House, whilst the other site they had been considering had since been otherwise disposed off. Further, it was unlikely that they would be offered any other.¹³⁹ The W.R.A., therefore, were now faced with the possibility, if not the certainty, of no site for their activities. For the purpose of a Community Centre, however, a site did remain available.¹⁴⁰ To the W.R.A. this was better than nothing. As Wyndham Deedes put it, the negotiations between the two Associations terminated “happily in a decision to co-operate.”

“Your offer of a site has been communicated to the Watling Residents’ Association who have informed me that if there in fact be no other site on the Estate but the one now offered ... they very willingly accept it.”¹⁴¹

There were, however, conditions placed upon this co-operation by the Watling Association. In line with the ideals of the N.E.C.C., the Residents’ Association were required to alter their constitution to provide that every organisation on the Estate could affiliate and be represented on their Committee, or Council as it would be called.¹⁴² The Council was to consist of fifteen members of the Residents’ Association, together with representatives of all other organisations on the estate.¹⁴³ This, then, was the federation ideal of the model Community Association, as represented schematically by Figure 6.1. I do not wish to labour the point, but:

“The fundamental idea underlying the formation of a Community

¹³⁸ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 6.8.29. G.L.R.O. LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹³⁹ Letter from F. Hunt to Wyndham Deedes, 13.8.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from F. Hunt to Wyndham Deedes, 29.10.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

¹⁴¹ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 21.11.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹⁴² *The Watling Resident* 2 (9) (January 1930), 3. Letter from S.E. Sharpe (Hon. Sec. of W.A.) to all organisations on the Watling estate, 9.2.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹⁴³ *The Watling Resident* 2 (9) (January 1930), 3. Minutes of the third meeting of the Watling Association, 6.12.29. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

Association is that all the groups of people functioning on an estate should federate together and form a Community Association representative of all the varying activities on an estate.”¹⁴⁴

Further, in line with N.E.C.C. policy, the Association was no longer restricted to the residents of the estate. To give the residents ‘help, comfort and a widening of interest’, the Council of the Association was to contain “representatives of local community interests and one or two with national experience.” This was a point emphasised by renaming the Association. It was no longer to be known as the Residents’ Association. Instead the W.R.A. needed to adopt the title of the Watling Association, a point that provoked “considerable thought and argument.” The N.E.C.C., therefore, were not content to merely impose their values upon the W.R.A., but their name too. The W.R.A. was being transformed to fit the N.E.C.C. model and reflect the national structure. However, the W.R.A. agreed and first announced the planned changes to the people of Watling in the *Resident* in January 1930:

“We, as the Executive Committee, believe that it would be in the interests of our members and the Estate as a whole to adopt the scheme, and at a recent Committee meeting it was unanimously resolved to recommend to the general membership the adoption of the new constitution and title.”

I stress, however, that their reason for doing so was the hope of obtaining a hall on the estate for their activities:

“We are all extremely anxious to have a Residents’ Hall on the Estate, and we are sure that these plans will hasten the day that will see this hall built.”¹⁴⁵

This was also emphasised when the matter was placed before the general membership of the W.R.A. in mid-January, with Mr. Dixon of the N.C.S.S. present. Finances, the residents were told, “would be forthcoming for the building of a hall.” As a result, the plan for the transformation of the Watling Residents’ Association into the Watling Association was “unanimously endorsed.”¹⁴⁶ As Ronald Payne, the estate clerk, recalled, the tenants were co-operative because “for one thing they [the W.A.] had money.”¹⁴⁷

The process of federation soon began, after the reasons for it had been

¹⁴⁴ Letter from M.M. Bruce (Sec. of L.C.S.S.) to A.J. Cass (Valuer’s Department), 31.3.37. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹⁴⁵ *The Watling Resident* 2 (9) (January 1930), 3.

¹⁴⁶ *The Watling Resident* 2 (10) (February 1930), 12.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Mr. Payne.

outlined in a circular distributed to all organisations on the estate. By affiliating the various organisations together it was hoped “to arrive at a co-ordinated community life on the Estate embracing every sphere of activity.”¹⁴⁸ By “weaving together the various societies and associations on the estate” the W.A. would “make a communal whole.”¹⁴⁹ This was the vision of the Community Association. By March 1930 the Co-operative Women’s Guild and the Co-operative Political Council had affiliated. The Watling District Nursing Association and the Watling Guild of Players, a drama group, had applied to do so. It needs to be pointed out, however, that both were already intimately connected with either the old Residents’ Association or the new Watling Association. Rev. Copinger was the founder and President of the Nursing Association, whilst the Guild of Players had been set up by A.E. Ville, one of the founders of the W.R.A. and the Editor of the *Resident*. The Townwomen’s Guild were also considering joining.¹⁵⁰

This process was of the utmost importance to the Association for, as in the case of the W.R.A. and R.E.T.A., it sought to extend its influence over all interests on the estate. There was an attempt to further extend it by automatically making every resident on the estate over the age of fifteen a member of the Association, whether they liked it or not, and able to vote on issues at its meetings. This they called an “open-door” policy.¹⁵¹ In addition, the non-political and non-sectarian policy of the former Residents’ Association was also continued. As such, it was argued:

“There is a place in the Association for everybody. There is no distinction of religious beliefs or political opinions: it is a non-sectarian and non-political body.”¹⁵²

Once again this was to give the Association meaning, to legitimate its activities in the broad context of the whole estate:

“The Association, because of its representative character, is well able to speak concerning the needs and aspirations of Watling.”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Letter from S.E. Sharpe (Hon. Sec. of W.A.) to all organisations on the Watling estate, 9.2.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

¹⁴⁹ *The Watling Resident* 3 (3) (July 1930), 12.

¹⁵⁰ *The Watling Resident* 2 (11) (March 1930), 14.

¹⁵¹ *The Watling Resident* 4 (11) (February 1932), 10.

¹⁵² *The Watling Resident* 3 (6) (October 1930), 12.

¹⁵³ *The Watling Resident* 3 (9) (January 1931), 12.

Of course the ideal of community was employed to emphasise such legitimisation as it was throughout the Community Association movement. The W.A. was not simply representative of the needs and aspirations of Watling, but the *community* that was Watling:

“The aim of the Watling Association is to cater for the whole needs of our community and of the individuals who make up our community.”¹⁵⁴

“Will you give us your support? Or are you indifferent to the needs of the Community in which you live.”¹⁵⁵

The much desired meeting place, or Community Centre or Community Hall as it was now called, was also a central feature in the ideal of uniting all the residents in the search for community, as it was in N.E.C.C. theory:

“This Hall ... will focus the spirit of comradeship and good-fellowship that is so essential to the development of a Community consciousness.”¹⁵⁶

“Watling can never speak with one voice without this outward sign of a united and progressive community, that is the Community Hall.”¹⁵⁷

It would “symbolise the spirit of community.”¹⁵⁸ The thinking behind this was repeatedly stressed, emphasising that the Centre would belong to the people of Watling and that everybody could meet there because, once again, the Association was non-political and non-sectarian:

“It will belong to the people of Watling. It will be yours and ours, in virtue of a common residence on the Estate; it will be a place where we, with our particular set of ideas on religion and politics and life, may meet you with your particular set of ideas.”¹⁵⁹

However, although the residents and the W.R.A. had been told that money ‘would be forthcoming’ for this physical symbol of community, initially it was not. The building fund inaugurated by the W.R.A. in its last few months was continued by the W.A. and, complemented by similar ‘Watling Weeks’ in 1930 and 1931 plus a “buy a brick” campaign, amounted to over £400 by the end of 1931.¹⁶⁰ Financial help from outside the estate, however, still appeared remote. A temporary Community

¹⁵⁴ *The Watling Resident* 3 (6) (October 1930), 12.

¹⁵⁵ *The Watling Resident* 3 (11) (March 1931), 8.

¹⁵⁶ *The Watling Resident* 3 (8) (December 1930), 2.

¹⁵⁷ *The Watling Resident* 4 (5) (September 1931), 10.

¹⁵⁸ *The Watling Resident* 3 (10) (February 1931), 12.

¹⁵⁹ *The Watling Resident* 3 (10) (February 1931), 12.

¹⁶⁰ *The Watling Resident* 4 (9) (January 1932), 4.

Centre, therefore, was established in October 1931 in a house rented from the L.C.C. at 35 Abbots Road.¹⁶¹

In January 1932, however, there was “the dawn of a new era.”¹⁶² Appreciative, at least to an extent, of the value and need of the work of the Community Association movement, the Pilgrim Trust agreed to give a grant of £2000 together with an interest-free loan of £700 for the experimental construction of a Community Centre. The Watling estate was chosen because of the money the residents had already raised.¹⁶³ Once again the L.C.C. regarded the plans of the Watling Association and the N.E.C.C. favourably:

“We are of the opinion that the proposed scheme will form a desirable amenity for the Council’s tenants and should receive the Council’s support.”¹⁶⁴

Again, the representative, all-encompassing nature of the soon-to-be Centre was stressed:

“This is not a partisan affair: the hall will not be for the use of a select clique: it will be the common meeting place and the social and educational centre for *all* Watling.”¹⁶⁵

Similarly, it was again emphasised that it would be central in the ‘upbuilding’ of the ‘ideal’, federated community:

“Our Community Centre ... will be a solid basis for co-operation, a meeting place in which all sorts of people and organisations, with many different interests and enthusiasms, may come together to work out their own ideas and to help each other in the upbuilding of the Ideal Community to which we are struggling.”¹⁶⁶

The design of the Centre included a small hall, a common room, an office and three committee rooms.¹⁶⁷ On the 18th of January 1933 it was opened by the Patron of the N.C.S.S. - the Prince of Wales - supported by Stanley Baldwin - senior trustee of the Pilgrim Trust - and the Mayor of Hendon.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, *Watling Community Association*, 20.

¹⁶² *The Watling Resident* 4 (9) January 1932), 4.

¹⁶³ Letter from L. Ellis (Sec. of N.E.C.C.) to Clerk of Council, 21.12.31. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27. *The Watling Resident* 5 (6) (October 1932), 10-1.

¹⁶⁴ Report of the Housing Committee, 15.3.32., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1932* (London 1932), 408-9.

¹⁶⁵ *The Watling Resident* 4 (9) (January 1932), 6.

¹⁶⁶ *The Watling Resident* 5 (4) (August 1932), 8.

¹⁶⁷ E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, *The Watling Community Association*, 26.

¹⁶⁸ *The Watling Resident* 5 (10) (February 1933), 12.

Although the integration of all residents and organisations into the W.A., and the physical expression of this through the Community Centre, was central to the creation of community on Watling, this ideal of community was not the same as that held by the W.R.A. and detailed in the previous chapter. True, there needed to be the horizontal interlocking of all within the Watling Association, but the reasons were not to enhance the social connections between the residents. The objectives of the Association as laid down by its Constitution, for instance, contained not one mention of social activities.¹⁶⁹ This is not to claim that there were no social activities organised by the Association. Regular whist drives and dances were held at the Watling Centre. Such social activities, however, were a minor part of the Association's activities. (Plate 6.2). The Watling Association was orientated to higher goals in its upbuilding of community. The *Resident*, for instance, explained:

“Dances and whist drives are all very jolly, and help to engender a social spirit, but they alone do not justify the existence of the Centre.”¹⁷⁰

The aim of the W.A., reflecting that of the Community Association movement at a national level, was rather to catch all and sundry within the net of a moral community. As Councillor A.A. Naar, M.B.E., who represented H.U.D.C. upon the Association's General Council, put it:

“They have the material, they have the mentality; it is up to us to mould them.”¹⁷¹

Indeed, the moral basis of the W.A. became apparent at a very early stage, even before the W.R.A. had received its members' support for its transformation into the W.A. In the same issue of the *Resident* as the plans for the Association were announced, on the same page in fact, there was a plea for a “successful Community Theatre upon the Watling Estate.” It was to be a “live concern, giving food for thought, as well as merriment to Watling folk.”¹⁷² As the Editorial of the *Resident* later commented of the virtues of such drama:

“Producing a play is a wonderful lesson in many of the characteristics which are needed to be the good citizen.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ See, for instance, *The Watling Resident* 4 (1) (May 1931), 2.

¹⁷⁰ *The Watling Resident* 6 (5) (September 1933), 7.

¹⁷¹ *The Watling Resident* 3 (6) (October 1930), 14; and 5 (7) (November 1932), 10.

¹⁷² *The Watling Resident* 2 (9) (January 1930), 3.

¹⁷³ *The Watling Resident* 6 (1) (May 1933) 10.

To assist in this successive young fellows, undoubtedly of wise leadership and wide experience, came to live on the estate to work as the Association's Organising Secretary - "to join in the community effort."¹⁷⁴ The first, Percy Lee, soon made his purpose clear:

"My duties with the Watling Association will include the development of educational activities on the Estate. ... The term education is used in its widest sense and includes all those activities which help to make life happier and fuller. To some these take the form of sport, photography, gardening, handicrafts, cookey and so on; others may prefer lectures and discussions on more abstract subjects, such as psychology, economics, and literature."¹⁷⁵

He rapidly organised lantern lectures and evening discussions on subjects including "Palestine" and "Life in Parliament." "Those who had already tasted their delights," he suggested, "will agree in regarding these as part of the chief joys of community life."¹⁷⁶

The redeeming of the soul that such education would allow later became explicit, contrasting the evils of the unconstructive use of leisure to the benefits of learning citizenship. "Shall we decay as other civilizations have before us?" the *Resident* inquired of its readers in January 1933. Apparently not, for:

"There is one method to avoid those perils. We must educate ourselves for leisure; not for leisure but for corporate endeavour. Only in that way shall we escape the boredom that comes from a surfeit of pleasures, only by training in citizenship shall we become worthy to survive."¹⁷⁷

Similarly, under the heading of "The Watling Association - What it Is - What it Seeks to Do," a later contributor, Mr. Ames, the Treasurer of the W.A., wrote:

"It is as essential to receive instructive teaching in the proper use of one's leisure as in other functions."¹⁷⁸

For the children of the estate, meanwhile, the Association suggested a song they could learn:

"For we're mighty proud of Watling;
Yes, we're jolly proud of Watling;
Sure we're proud of Watling,
And we mean to make Watling proud of us!"¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 14.5.30. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1 27.

¹⁷⁵ *The Watling Resident* 3 (5) (September 1930), 2.

¹⁷⁶ *The Watling Resident* 3 (6) (October 1930), 13.

¹⁷⁷ *The Watling Resident* 5 (9) (January 1933), 6.

¹⁷⁸ *The Watling Resident* 5 (10) (February 1933), 23.

¹⁷⁹ *The Watling Resident* 4 (2) (June 1931), 7.

The aims of the Watling Girls' Club appeared to point the way to this. In addition to promoting friendship it would "cultivate minds and bodies and make good citizens."¹⁸⁰

The mental uplift effected by physical training and the beneficial pursuit of healthy outdoor activities, as opposed to commercialised entertainments, came to be emphasised too. For instance:

"You cannot entirely separate body and mind, and it is very evident that rhythm and beauty of body may have a profound influence on mental development."¹⁸¹

"Camping is a more ideal form of enjoyment than such things as cinemas, dances, parties of motor-coach trippers and the usual places that cater for pleasure in town. Why? Because camping brings with it an appreciation of the countryside, the wonders of creation, in fact it is our most convenient way of getting back to nature and health."¹⁸²

The Youth Hostel Association was similarly praised as a most worthy pursuit for "contact with the country is essential to a complete life."¹⁸³ In fact, to take full advantage of the "undisputed claims of sun, air and physical freedom" a nudist club was also suggested.¹⁸⁴ If the residents were to lie naked behind the Watling Centre, it was argued, there would be "advantages to be gained from the moral viewpoint."¹⁸⁵

The moralised nature of the community sought by the Watling Association was evident in other respects too. As was mentioned in Chapter Three there were originally plans for a pub on Watling. These, however, had encountered difficulties with the local licensing authorities, resulting in two separate applications for the granting of a licence. At the first, in 1929, it had been the policy of the W.R.A. to take no sides on the issue. Although they believed the pub would have been a welcome addition to the facilities of the estate, they also feared that if it was built it could jeopardise their hopes of obtaining a site for a hall.¹⁸⁶ By the time of the second hearing, however, in early 1931, the stance of the Watling Association was very different. Although it was argued that the W.A. was "in no way upholding any

¹⁸⁰ *The Watling Resident* 4 (7) (November 1931), 14.

¹⁸¹ *The Watling Resident* 6 (1) (May 1933), 10.

¹⁸² *The Watling Resident* 6 (4) (August 1933), 17.

¹⁸³ *The Watling Resident* 11 (12) (April 1939), 16.

¹⁸⁴ *The Watling Resident* 8 (8) (December 1935), 4.

¹⁸⁵ *The Watling Resident* 8 (10) (January 1936), 5.

¹⁸⁶ *The Watling Resident* 1 (10) (February 1929), 242 & 252.

temperance ideals,” solicitors were authorised to appear on the Association’s behalf at the hearing to oppose the application. For in the view of the W.A.:

“The establishment of licenced house is detrimental to the amenities of the Estate, and any addition to the number of licenced houses would be likely to increase drunkenness and disorder.”¹⁸⁷

This was a far cry from the earlier ideals of the W.R.A. who had wished to procure ‘drinks of all kind’ within their club house. There was also evident concern for both the sexual and moral health of Watling’s population. For instance, Amy Johnston, the aviator, who apparently also had some knowledge of venereal disease, wrote in the *Resident* on the subject of “Health and Happiness.”

“There are certain difficulties and temptations which most of us meet with in our journey through life. Sometimes it is hard to know just how to act, how to guide this human machine of ours to safety, but if you will write to the British Social Hygiene Council ...”¹⁸⁸

The ideals of the Garden Suburb movement also began to crop up as a repeated theme within the Association. In November 1931, for instance, an anti-litter campaign was launched, together with the battle-cry:

“We must co-operate, old and young together, if we want Watling Garden Suburb.”¹⁸⁹

This was clearly an ideal of community that was structured by class. It was the working class who were being uplifted. It also needs to be pointed out that it was structured by gender. In common with all the ideals of community that I have detailed, the moral community of the Watling Association was patriarchal. Again there was the assumption that women’s interests were restricted to solely domestic issues. In October 1930, for instance, Marjorie Lee - Percy’s wife - issued a plea for women to join the Association:

“In organisations of this kind it is sadly true that the majority of the members are usually men. In this case I would prefer the position to be reversed. If it is only possible for one member of the family to ‘Join the Watling Association’, let it be the wife.”

An apparently enlightened and progressive plea, until her plans for the women within the Association were made clearer:

“We can run classes in all those things that women love - cookery,

¹⁸⁷ *The Watling Resident* 3 (10) (February 1931), 10.

¹⁸⁸ *The Watling Resident* 5 (4) (August 1932), 11.

¹⁸⁹ *The Watling Resident* 4 (7) (November 1931), 1.

dressmaking, first aid, home furnishings, handicrafts.”¹⁹⁰

The Townswomen’s Guild, which did choose to affiliate in 1930, might be thought to have offered an alternative.¹⁹¹ To an extent it did. Albeit in a spirit of citizenship and uplift, lectures and events were organised with an emphasis on female participation in the public realm. In May of 1930, for instance, the Guild members were taken on a tour of the Royal Mint.¹⁹² Six years later, they listened to Councillor Mrs. Thomas speak on the “Work of the Borough Council.”¹⁹³ The National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, the organisers of the Guild movement, it needs to be stressed were a suffragist rather than suffragette body, however.¹⁹⁴ This was reflected in their other activities. In their “ambitious programme for 1931,” for instance, the “subjects of particular interest and appeal to the female fraternity” included demonstrations on cooking, toy making, stool making and “similar useful handicrafts.”¹⁹⁵ As Plate 6.3 suggests, these appear to have been embroidery and basket making. The women of Watling were also to be included in the new moral community of the Watling Association for even the innocuous activity of handicrafts was promoted to “develop your hands as well as your brain,” and, thus enabled the women to become “a great asset in any community.”¹⁹⁶ Their position in the new community, however, was predominantly in the home.

In line with the spirit of the N.C.S.S., there was also inherent within this vision of the patriarchal New Jerusalem significant emphasis placed upon the service of the Watling Association to the new community it was creating. A “Poor Man’s Lawyer”, for instance, was provided as a “service for the community.”¹⁹⁷ Its physical embodiment, as in all other aspects of the Association’s community, was the Community Centre:

“That great ideal of community life - which implies, of course, community

¹⁹⁰ *The Watling Resident* 3 (6) October 1930), 6.

¹⁹¹ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 6.9.30., 9

¹⁹² *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 23.5.30., 9.

¹⁹³ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 24.7.36., 4.

¹⁹⁴ See C. Merz, *After the Vote: The story of the National Union of Townswomen’s Guilds in the year of its Diamond Jubilee* (Norwich, 1988).

¹⁹⁵ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 9.1.31., 7.

¹⁹⁶ *The Watling Resident* 10 (10) (February 1938), 7.

¹⁹⁷ *The Watling Resident* 3 (10) (February 1931), 3.

service - will be embodied in this Centre.”¹⁹⁸

A feature of the residents’ new moral heights, however, was that they too should be contributing to the community. Edward Sewell Harris had in July 1931 replaced Percy Lee as Organising Secretary.¹⁹⁹ According to Ronald Payne, he was:

“A very good man and very devoted to the idea of fostering a new community identity, and he worked very hard to that end.”²⁰⁰

He certainly wasted little time in stressing the need for residents to serve each other to help build up the new community identity. It was, he argued:

“The spirit in which each finds the best contribution which he or she can offer, which makes the difference between a mere collection of houses and a real community.”²⁰¹

On Watling the creation of the new moral community was vigorously pursued. The Community Association movement had established a Watling Association outside the estate, merged it with the estate’s Residents’ Association, and transformed it in their image. Other organisations had been affiliated and outside influences brought in to guide it. The Community Centre had been built, with rooms for dramatic productions, lectures, and discussion groups. Purely social activities had been marginalised in preference to pursuits aimed to develop the mind and body. The planned model of moral community was coming together and being implemented at the local level. Watling, however, soon threw a few spanners into the works.

(ii) Communists In The New Community.

“This Watling - what’s wrong? A lot. Since leaving our old places of habitation, politics have come more into the limelight than before. To be blunt - this Estate is chained to politics! Bedridden with them if you like. Jealousy is rife! Bias has many devotees. Hate is tolerated by several. Snobbery hard to dispel. *Something for nothing* is the war cry.”²⁰²

I have shown that the Watling Association was formed to promote the uplifted, improved community by moulding people into new forms through constructive leisure and other means of moral virtue. However, for a small yet

¹⁹⁸ *The Watling Resident* 3 (10) (February 1931), 12.

¹⁹⁹ E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molly, *Watling Community Association*, 20

²⁰⁰ Interview with Mr. Payne.

²⁰¹ *The Watling Resident* 4 (5) (September 1931), 2.

²⁰² *The Watling Resident* 5 (4) (August 1932), 19 Emphasis in the original.

active part of the population of Watling this was not what they envisaged as the purpose of the W.A. The Communists on Watling, in much the same way as they had acted within the old Residents' Association, soon began to attempt to promote their values and aims within the Watling Association. Although they did not believe in the Association's ideals, they worked within it to convert it to their own ends. Moreover, the Communists achieved this with a greater degree of success than they had experienced within the Residents' Association. Their activities, I argue, did not correspond with the stance, moral or otherwise, of the N.E.C.C. as to the purpose of a Community Association. There was no place for a Communist Sunday School, for instance, within the N.E.C.C.'s schematic representation of the model Community Association. There was, therefore, a struggle within the Watling Association as to precisely what its activities - the activities leading to a new community - should be.

Although restricted in their activities within the former Residents' Association and ultimately denied any success in their aims, and not immediately visible within the W.A., the Communists on Watling had not disappeared. In September 1931 chalked notices began to appear on the pavements of the estate advertising a meeting to be held in Gervase Road to discuss rent reductions. Jack Carson spoke first, followed by a speaker who, according to a writer to the *Resident*, "thrust his communistic views down the throats of the audience."²⁰³ Those with the communistic views were back with a vengeance, and they quickly began to try to redefine the ideals of the W.A.

Initially the Communists operated as a body known as the Watling Tenants' Defence League [T.D.L.]. Carson was the Organising Secretary, and in the November 1931 issue of the *Resident* he outlined the purposes of the League and his view of its relationship to the Watling Association. In the Watling Association, he argued, there was a need for a "militant 'class-conscious' section" for the Association was neglecting the needs of the people on the Estate it was supposed to represent. The "*immediate issue*" concerning the "workers" of Watling, he explained, was not:

"The Question of learning French or chess, or the provision of a tennis club, but that the *rents were too high* and that there was a *need for a Labour*

²⁰³ *The Watling Resident* 4 (6) (October 1931), 11.

*Exchange.*²⁰⁴

That the tenants were suffering distress during the industrial depression of the 1930s does appear extremely plausible. A later writer to the *Resident*, for instance, and one not propounding any political viewpoint, remarked upon the reality behind the Watling's neat gardens:

"I have found that in many cupboards there is little, or no food, and in place of food were many skeletons, not skeletons of someone murdered, but of acute poverty. I must say that I was astonished at the great amount of distress prevailing on this Estate, but with one thousand two hundred unemployed, and hundred more on reduced wages it can hardly be wondered at."²⁰⁵

The Tenants' Defence League, Carson argued, had been born of such urgent needs and took on a "militant form" because the W.A., if it was to remain non-political, could not take up the issue. Somewhat astutely, he further explained that the Association could not take up such issues anyway, because:

"By doing so it will annoy certain of its constituent bodies who, by the very nature of the role they fill in the present system of society, would object to such agitation, on the ground, for instance, that such agitation was 'unpatriotic'."

The League, he continued, would only oppose and fight the W.A. if it found that the Association directly opposed it. What he wanted, however, was for the Association to support his campaign for a twenty-five per cent. rent reduction. In a plea which mirrored the Community Association's calls for federation he called for unity between the two bodies in the pursuit of the interests of the working class:

"The T.D.L. is for unity on the issues of interest to the working class. It is for the Association to work with it and form the unity that is so necessary in the huge struggles that lie ahead."²⁰⁶

The response of the W.A., however, was to reject such unity. The only body capable of presenting the case for rent reduction, it argued, was the Watling Association, by reason of its "representative character."²⁰⁷

The following month the Communists came out into the open and, although they may not have been numerous on Watling, generally low attendances at the meetings of the W.A., coupled with the Association's 'open-door' policy, enabled

²⁰⁴ *The Watling Resident* 4 (7) (November 1931), 7. Emphasis in the original.

²⁰⁵ *The Watling Resident* 5 (10) (February 1933), 20.

²⁰⁶ *The Watling Resident* 4 (7) (November 1931), 7.

²⁰⁷ *The Watling Resident* 4 (7) (November 1931), 10.

the Communists on the estate to vote for the acceptance of their local branch as an affiliated organisation of the W.A.²⁰⁸ According to E.G. Bishop, writing to the *Gazette*, they were prepared:

“With a policy which they believe is the policy for the residents, and are prepared to work in order that the community may have the benefit of their efforts.”²⁰⁹

They soon began to attempt to implement it to the dismay of the N.E.C.C.

In the June 1932 issue of the *Resident* a letter to the W.A. from J. Alabaster of the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement urged the Association to press the L.C.C. to speed up the provision of council houses at working-class rents.²¹⁰ The call was taken up by the Communists, and Sewell Harris wrote to the L.C.C.:

“I am instructed by my Council to write to you to urge the desirability of the L.C.C. Housing Schemes being speeded up.”²¹¹

This was a ‘local negotiation’ of the activities of the Watling Association that was certainly not welcomed at N.E.C.C. headquarters. Deedes, with the full approval of Lionel Ellis, the secretary of the N.C.S.S., “wholly depreciate[d]” such an urge coming from the W.A. Although he believed it was within the competence of a Community Association to call the attention of the relevant authorities to “any question of importance affecting the welfare of residents” on an estate, it was:

“Quite outside the competence of a Community Association to officially comment on the general policy of the County Council.”

This, he informed Hunt of the L.C.C., he had made known to the Community Association.²¹² As a result Sewell Harris withdrew the letter of “militant and indiscrete character,” as the *Resident* described it.²¹³

Further deviations from the community ideal of the N.E.C.C. continued as the Communist Party, as Carson put it, availed “itself of all opportunities afforded by belonging to the Association.”²¹⁴ By the end of the 1932 a series of ‘Lectures on the Class Struggle’ had been organised by the Communist Party to be held at the

²⁰⁸ *The Watling Resident* 4 (9) (January 1932), 5; and 4 (11) (March 1932), 10.

²⁰⁹ *The Watling Resident* 4 (11) (March 1932), 10.

²¹ *The Watling Resident* 5 (2) (June 1932), 10.

²¹¹ Letter from Sewell Harris to F. Hunt, 6.6.32. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

²¹² Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 6.7.32. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

²¹³ *The Watling Resident* 5 (6) (October 1932), 16.

²¹⁴ *The Watling Resident* 5 (1) (May 1932), 8.

recently finished Watling Centre. Jack Cohen, for instance, was to talk on “Agent Provocateurs in the Workers’ Movement.” The L.C.C., taking “strong exception to any activities of this kind,” immediately informed the N.E.C.C. that:

“If the Hall is used for these purposes the Council will certainly exercise its right to put an end to the Lease. I must ask you to give immediate attention to the matter.”²¹⁵

This was no empty threat for although the L.C.C. had played no part in the building of the Centre they did still own the land which it occupied and they had inserted a clause in the lease of the site that:

“The Council shall be at liberty to call upon the lessees to discontinue any activities which are at any time ... regarded by the Council as objectionable.”²¹⁶

The N.E.C.C. stressed this to the W.A. Council and the lectures were cancelled.²¹⁷ Deedes then assured the L.C.C. that the Committee of Management of the Centre were in complete control over the activities that would take place there, and there would be none “prejudicial to its objects.”²¹⁸ These views of the N.E.C.C., however, did not correspond with those expressed on the estate. When, for instance, the lectures were cancelled, Sewell Harris informed the L.C.C. that:

“The following resolution of the members of the Community Centre was passed: ‘That the council represents to the London County Council that the embargo imposed by them on the Communist lectures is not in the best interests of the Community spirit.’”²¹⁹

As Hunt expressed it to Deedes:

“I thought it would be well to make sure that you were aware of the attitude which the local Association has adopted in the matter.”²²⁰

Moreover, not just did the influence of the Communists mean that the W.A. adopted a different line to the N.E.C.C., but the Communist Party were not to be deflected in their attempts to use the Watling Centre for their own purposes. The lecture bookings now became ordinary bookings for the Party, and they notified the

²¹⁵ Letter from F. Hunt to Wyndham Deedes, 30.11.32. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

²¹⁶ Report of the Housing Committee, 15.3.32., in L.C.C., *Minutes of Proceedings 1932* (London 1932), 408-9.

²¹⁷ *The Watling Resident* 5 (9) (January 1933), 20. Letter from Sewell Harris to F. Hunt, 16.12.32. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1 27.

²¹⁸ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 20.12.32. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

²¹⁹ Letter from Sewell Harris to F. Hunt, 16.12.32. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/27; and *The Watling Resident* 5 (9) (January 1933), 20.

²² Letter from F. Hunt to Wyndham Deedes, 22.12.32. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

Association not to be surprised if Communist members attempted to explain the Communist viewpoint at the meetings.²²¹ Further, Jack Carson, the Communist leader, was elected to the Council of the Association, even though he did not live on the estate. Hunt requested Wyndham Deedes to explain why. His answer shows the exasperation experienced as a policy which had been designed to allow the external influence thought necessary by the N.E.C.C. was subverted by the Communists:

“We have always held that it is well that there should be a small mixture of outside people who can bring to the deliberations of the Council a different kind of experience. That you see is the difficulty!”²²²

The N.E.C.C. were clearly having difficulties in their pursuit of community. Although it was their “practice to devolve upon Community Associations a fairly wide measure of local control” and, moreover, to seek to federate all the groups and organisations within the estate, such policies had opened it up to the Communist Party and were tempting the L.C.C. to effectively close down the Association. In “the interests of the Association as a whole”, therefore, from April 1933 they began to consider the expulsion of the Communist Party.²²³

The Communists, however, became increasingly active. By January 1934, they were holding a regular monthly Sunday School within the Watling Centre. Sewell Harris, Hunt noted, when again threatening to cancel the lease of the Centre, appeared unaware of what went on there. He himself suspected that the children attending were being taught:

“Doctrines repugnant not only to English religious thought but also to English conceptions of morality.”²²⁴

Sewell Harris, Deedes agreed, had not known “much about what was going on.” He had since found out though that the “Pioneers”, as they were called, denied the existence of God. There was also a “tendency to stimulate youthful enthusiasm in the direction of ‘revolution’.” This was hardly the vision of a new morally-uplifted community desired by the N.E.C.C., although it offered another, alternative New

²²¹ Report to the Housing (General) Sub-Committee by the Valuer, 30.1.33. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/27; and *The Watling Resident* 5 (9) (January 1933), 20.

²²² Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 13.5.33. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

²²³ Letter from L. Ellis to F. Hunt, 25.4.33. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

²²⁴ Letter from F. Hunt to Wyndham Deedes, 18.1.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

Jerusalem.²²⁵

The situation could only get worse before it got better. The following month, at the W.A.'s Annual General Meeting, Carson and the Communists attempted to gain control of the Association by proposing that its policy be transferred from its Council to any meeting of ordinary members. The proposal was defeated.²²⁶ One that was carried, however, was to urge the L.C.C. to reduce rents on the estate.²²⁷ The following day Carson arranged a meeting at the Centre "attended by about 50 persons", to organize support for the 'hunger marchers' and opposition to the new Unemployment Bill.²²⁸ The level of influence attained by Carson within the W.A. by this stage was clearly demonstrated in his position as one of the official delegates to the 1934 N.E.C.C. Annual Conference.²²⁹

For almost a year, however, the Communist Party had been walking a tightrope. As Mrs. Lewington recalled of the time of the Jarrow Marchers, perhaps missing the point slightly, but making it all the same:

"Well there was meetings running there, there was meetings running there. And we had to steer carefully because they were relying on, I think they were relying on grants to help keep the Centre going."²³⁰

In April of 1934, the Party went one step too far. It published a circular, known as *The Watling Spark*, attacking the Association, its Council and its speakers at the Annual General Meeting for refusing to transfer control of the W.A. to the ordinary membership.²³¹ This was the limit of the endurance of the N.E.C.C. and W.A. or, perhaps more likely, the excuse they had been waiting for. At the W.A. Council meeting at the end of the month, one that was apparently not dominated by Communists, it was moved and carried that:

"Owing to the Communist Party's unjust attacks on the Association, the said Communist Party should be removed from the List of Affiliated Bodies of the Association."

²²⁵ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 25.1.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

²²⁶ *The Watling Resident* 6 (11) (March 1934), 8.; 6 (12) (April 1934), 9. Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 16.2.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/27.

²²⁷ Letter from Sewell Harris to F. Hunt, 8.3.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

²²⁸ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 16.2.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1 27.

²²⁹ *The Watling Resident* 7 (1) (May 1934), 1.

²³⁰ Interview with Mrs. Lewington.

²³¹ *The Watling Spark*, April 1934. Quoted in *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 6.4.24., 6.

For two and a half years, however, the Communist Party on Watling had successfully used the Community Centre for its own aims and ideals. It had clearly undermined the planned moral community of the N.E.C.C. for that period of time. However, as I will show in the next section, the association of the Communists with the W.A. was a more enduring legacy than this. It had so successfully confused the perception of the ideals of the national Community Association movement as it was realised on the ground at Watling that organisations and individuals turned their back on the W.A. This, together with other problems specific to Watling, ensured that the model of the new England was not successfully realised on the estate.

(iii) Our Success Has Not Been As Great As We Had Originally Hoped.

In this final section I wish to detail further problems that were experienced by the N.E.C.C. and W.A. in the promotion of their ideals of community. Problems in several cases, though by no means all, centered on the activities of the Communists. There were, I argue, local tensions existing on Watling which distorted the N.E.C.C. model of community, in particular its desire for federation and co-operation. First, the L.C.C., in contrast to the general national trend at the level of both central and local government, and although initially favourably inclined towards the Community Association movement on Watling, soon only developed, at best, a tenuous co-operation with the local Association. The Watling Association could not represent the tenants against their landlord while remaining on amicable terms with it. Second, three notable organisations on the estate chose to exclude themselves from this model of community. The Watling Horticultural Society, I argue, stayed outside simply because it had no need nor wish to join any hierarchical, over-arching body, particularly one that was less popular than itself. The Old Comrades' Association and Toc H, an organisation dedicated to similar ideals to the N.C.S.S. if there ever was one, stayed away because they did not wish to associate, or be associated with, the Communists of the W.A. The O.C.A. also disagreed with the W.A.'s heavy morality. Third, it is stressed, that individual residents largely ignored the Watling Association. Again, I suggest, this was partly in view of the Communists, but also because of a lack of interest in the salvation of their morality. The morality of the Watling Association's discourse of community, I emphasise, was

not reflected within their own conceptualizations of the term.

Although the Communists had been excluded from the Watling Association from May 1934 it soon became evident that there was still a strong difference of opinions between the N.E.C.C. and the L.C.C. over the purposes of the Association. Specifically, Deedes' conception of a Community Association as a body able to exert a powerful influence over policy at the Town Hall in respect of local estate affairs, one that would draw the attention of the authorities to any matter affecting the welfare of its members, found little favourable response at County Hall. The W.A., in pressing the L.C.C. on issues as minor as the colours of paint to be used in redecorating the houses, ensured that the Watling Association came to be regarded by the Council as an estate agitation, a view which detrimentally influenced its support for the W.A.

Having banished the Communists from its meetings and building, the Watling Association continued to upset the L.C.C. by pressing it on issues of concern to the estate's tenants. In August 1934, for instance, an article in the *Resident* asked tenants with more accommodation than they needed to contact the W.A. In the view of the Council this was an interference with its relationship to tenants, and it was "no part of the functions of the Watling Association" to do so.²³² As far as Sewell Harris and Deedes were concerned, however, it was the W.A.'s responsibility to do precisely this.²³³ They continued to do press the Council.

Come October, for instance, the Association wanted to discuss with Hunt a memorandum of some fifteen points of concern to the tenants. These included a desire for more frequent redecoration of houses with a choice of colours, less incivility from the Estate Clerks, an improved hot water system, and the less conspicuous delivery of notices of rent arrears.²³⁴ The same points were raised in April and June of the following year.²³⁵ On both occasions the L.C.C. refused to consider them: they were "matters entirely for the discretion of the Council."²³⁶ This

²³² Letter from F. Hunt to Wyndham Deedes, 7.8.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1 27.

²³³ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to F. Hunt, 13.8.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1/27.

²³⁴ Letter from Sewell Harris to F. Hunt, 5.11.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27. *The Watling Resident* 7 (5) (September 1934), 6.

²³⁵ Letter from Wyndham Deedes to Cass (Valuation, Estates, and Housing Dept.), 4.4.35; Letter from Sewell Harris to Westwood (Housing Committee), 28.6.35. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN/1 27.

²³⁶ Letter from F. Hunt to Sewell Harris, 5.7.35. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

was despite it once more being stressed to the L.C.C. that the Association saw this as a legitimate sphere of activity. This time the advocate was Barker, the Chairman of the N.E.C.C.:

“It is part of its purpose to take up any question concerned with the welfare of the residents and to make representations to the appropriate authority on such matters as transport facilities, provision of libraries, etc., etc., including landlord and tenant questions.”²³⁷

The effect of the Watling Association’s work in these areas was only to discourage the L.C.C.’s support for the Association, and to bring them to consider that perhaps the Council required greater powers in controlling their activities. One instance of this came at the end of 1934 when Sewell Harris approached the Housing Committee for a grant of £7,500 to enlarge the Watling Centre so as to provide accommodation for juvenile activities separate from those of the adults.²³⁸ After “careful consideration” this was refused.²³⁹ The careful consideration was outlined in a report by Hunt to the Council’s Housing and Public Health Committee. He was “unable to suggest any special reasons from the Council’s point of view” for granting the money, except:

“That in the event of the Council making itself responsible for the whole or a substantial portion of the cost of the buildings it would be in a position to require the terms of the Leases to be framed in such a way as to give the Council a larger measure of control over the activities carried on in the Centre.”²⁴⁰

A more damning condemnation then came late in 1935 when, in another report, Hunt provided an overview of the Council’s experiences with the N.E.C.C. The leases of “valuable” sites within the Council’s estates, he noted, had been granted on favourable terms upon:

“Representation by the Secretary of the National Council of Social Service that Community Centres are necessary to promote the ‘social and educational’ activities of tenants on new estates.”

Of the situation on Watling, however, it was his view that the Association was not restricting its activities to this.

²³⁷ Letter from E. Barker to Clerk of the L.C.C., 6.9.35. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7558.

²³⁸ Letter from Sewell Harris to Silkin, 18.12.34. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN/1/27.

²³⁹ Letter from Clerk of Council to Sewell Harris, 12.2.35. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG GEN 1/27.

²⁴⁰ Report of the Valuer to the Housing and Public Health Committee, 7.1.35. G.L.R.O. file LCC/HSG/GEN 1/27.

“During recent months it has transpired that the Watling Community Association was becoming a centre of agitation in matters affecting the Council’s administration of its Estate such as questions concerning repairs, etc.”²⁴¹

In the local context of Watling, therefore, the N.E.C.C.’s schematic model of community was proving impossible to secure. The L.C.C., rather than co-operating with the Community Association was considering means to control it. Other tensions were also occurring. In contrast to the ideal of federation - the integration of the organisations of Watling into a co-operative body overlooked by the Community Association - three of the most significant organisations on the estate chose not to be incorporated within the W.A.’s structure.

“Gardening,” the Editor of the *Resident* proclaimed in July 1931, “is the most civilising of all man’s [*sic*] hobbies.”²⁴² It should have pleased the W.A., therefore, that, as on Roehampton, it was extremely popular on Watling. (See Plate 6.4). In 1931, for instance, the Watling Horticultural Society [W.H.S.], the “most successful Watling Society”, had approximately eight hundred members.²⁴³ There was the problem, however, that the W.H.S. having previously disaffiliated from the W.R.A. refused to consider involving itself with its successor. This was not through a lack of effort on behalf of the W.A. In October 1930, for instance, Percy Lee had met with representatives of the W.H.S. to “invite their organisation to co-operate with the Association in its community endeavours.” His invitation was declined.²⁴⁴ W.T. Sharpe of the W.H.S. explained, in no uncertain terms, why:

“Surely it can hardly be expected that a large and flourishing organisation would readily co-operate, coordinate or affiliate to a smaller organisation.”²⁴⁵

There was, therefore, a rather large hole in the W.A.’s attempted affiliation of all the organisations on the estate. There were others too.

The Old Comrades’ Association, whose popularity has already been detailed, also refused to join with the Watling Association. At their Annual General Meeting

²⁴¹ ‘St. Helier Estate - Hill House. New Estates Community Committee’, report by F. Hunt to Housing and Public Health Committee, 16.10.35. G.L.R.O. file LCC/MIN/7558.

²⁴² *The Watling Resident* 4 (3) (July 1931), 10.

²⁴³ *The Watling Resident* 4 (3) (July 1931), 10.

²⁴⁴ *The Watling Resident* 3 (6) (October 1930), 12.

²⁴⁵ *Hendon Times and Guardian*, 4.3.32., 15.

in 1932 those attending voted by sixty-nine votes to three against affiliation.²⁴⁶ This was, in part, a reaction against the Communist presence there, but it was also a protest against the underlying principle of the Association, that of moral uplift. Don Ack of the O.C.A. explained why in a letter to the *Resident*. He referred first to the issue of the Communists, their writings in the *Resident* (including those of the T.D.L.), and their Sunday School. Their beliefs, he argued, were the “antithesis of the principles for which ex-service men stand.”

“Can you therefore blame an organised body of the latter for withholding their support from an association whose administrators allow the publication of ideas and opinions so fundamentally opposed to their own? We are asked to buy bricks to build a hall! For what purposes? One would appear to be the creation of facilities for holding *Sunday* afternoon meetings of the ‘Young Pioneers’.”

The “wailing” of The Red Flag at the end of the W.A.’s meetings was a further point he found objectionable. Turning then to the respective activities of the two Associations he denounced the attempted ‘social uplift’ of the W.A. The O.C.A., he argued, promoted “homely, comradely and otherwise ordinary things,” whereas the W.A. had “the singing of high-brow folk songs and reading of poetry.” Although O.C.A. members as individuals were welcome to follow their own tastes in adult education, within the Association they would prefer - in line with the view of the old Residents’ Association - “social amusement to social uplift.”²⁴⁷

If the W.A. found the refusal of both the W.H.S. and O.C.A. to affiliate disappointing, then the corresponding attitude of the Toc H organisation on the estate was probably considered devastating. Toc H was an organisation modelled along the lines of service to the community. Its objects were:

“To bring into civil life the old social mixture of the trenches; to destroy suspicions between class and class; to spread the doctrine that, in public as in private life, the way of selfishness leads to chaos, and to form branches in every community where those engaged in social work may meet and sink their differences in common service to others.”²⁴⁸

Not that surprisingly, therefore, it had been one of the earliest bodies operating on Watling to sign up to the community ideal of the W.A. when it affiliated in June 1930. That it held the vision of the W.A. close to its heart was demonstrated in

²⁴⁶ *The Watling Resident* 5 (2) (June 1932), 14.

²⁴⁷ *The Watling Resident* 4 (12) (April 1932), 6-7. Emphasis in the original.

²⁴⁸ *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 27.9.29., 3.

August 1931 when Tom May, its organiser, urged those antagonistic to the Association, doubtless meaning the W.H.S., to “bury the hatchet and come in.”²⁴⁹ In March of 1933, however, it buried the hatchet in a different way. Its objects, Tom May decided, “could best be served by disaffiliation from the Watling Association.”²⁵⁰ Occurring in the midst of the Communist involvement in the W.A., the reasons, although not stated, are not hard to find.

The Watling Association, and its goal of community, had failed to attract, or at least maintain, the support of three significant organisations on the estate - two of the most popular in the shape of the W.H.S. and O.C.A., and Toc H, which held essentially the same vision as its own. This was either because the organisations saw nothing to gain by affiliating, were discouraged by the activities of the Communist Party within the Association, or disagreed with its aim of moral uplift. It was a damning condemnation of the local success of the N.E.C.C. ideal. The schematic model of community had several large blocks missing from it on Watling. As the W.A. admitted:

“One of the main aims of the Association has been to co-ordinate effort on the estate. Here, we must admit ... that our success has not been as great as we had originally hoped.”²⁵¹

The Association’s lack of success, however, went deeper still. Not only did the L.C.C., W.H.S., O.C.A., and Toc H distance themselves from the W.A., but so did the individual residents of Watling. General support for the Association was not forthcoming. Again, this was admitted, and lamented, by the W.A. In July 1932, for instance, it was noted:

“Watling seems to be asleep, and it is a great pity that this should be, for there are just a small number who work very hard for the sake of the community.”²⁵²

After the 1932 Watling Week critics of the organiser, Jack Radley, were roundly turned upon by the Editor of the *Resident*. The residents were the ones who should be criticised, he argued, for:

“The trouble was he [Radley] overestimated the loyalty of the 25,000 Watling residents. He expected their support and co-operation. In the main

²⁴⁹ *The Watling Resident* 4 (4) (August 1931), 12.

²⁵⁰ *Hendon Times and Borough Guardian*, 17.3.33., 9.

²⁵¹ *The Watling Resident* 3 (9) (January 1931), 12

²⁵² *The Watling Resident* 5 (3) (July 1932), 15.

it did *not* come.”²⁵³

This lack of support is reflected in the membership levels for the W.A. In 1933, when the Association’s Centre - ‘the dawn of a new era’ - had been built and opened to the world, there were six hundred and sixty members.²⁵⁴ The following year the Membership Secretary’s statement at the Association’s Annual General Meeting “was a disturbing one,” disclosing a “continued heavy decline in paying membership.”²⁵⁵ Similarly, when a membership canvass was held in 1936 its results were far from encouraging for “very few turned out.” As the *Resident* noted afterwards:

“This was specially regrettable as we very much need to bring the work of the Association to the careful attention of all residents on the Estate. We need more people alive to the meaning of a Community Association.”²⁵⁶

Perhaps the best reflection of how popular the Association was - of how many residents it encompassed within its ideal of community - came in January 1937. At that time the Association’s Veteran’s Club had fifty-six members, and this topped “the list in numbers for any one section of the Watling Association activities.”²⁵⁷ As the Editor of the *Resident* put it, more than eight years after the formation of the Watling Association, in July 1938:

“Apparently there are some people who have not yet heard of the Community Association.”²⁵⁸

I want to argue that this failure of the Association to convert the pagans of Watling in its preaching of the gospel of moral community had two reasons. First, it was not just the O.C.A., and almost certainly Toc H, that viewed the W.A. as an extension of the Soviet Union rather than the New Jerusalem. Within the wider population of Watling residents there were also those who perceived the Association as being a Communist body. A tenant of Watling asked to buy an issue of the *Resident*, for instance, responded, according to the journal, by saying, “No thanks! We don’t eat politics.”²⁵⁹ Similarly, a conversation heard outside the Watling Centre

²⁵³ *The Watling Resident* 5 (5) (September 1932), 1. Emphasis in the original.

²⁵⁴ *The Watling Resident* 5 (11) (March 1933), 16.

²⁵⁵ *The Watling Resident* 6 (11) (March 1934), 8.

²⁵⁶ *The Watling Resident* 9 (4) (August 1936), 5.

²⁵⁷ *The Watling Resident* 9 (9) (January 1937), 16.

²⁵⁸ *The Watling Resident* 11 (3) (July 1938), 5.

²⁵⁹ *The Watling Resident* 5 (5) (September 1932), 2.

was reported:

“*Maiden* (aged about 17 years) asking of anyone within earshot: ‘Is there a dance on here tonight?’

Youth (aged ditto) who happened to hear her: ‘No! But you ought to go in just the same with the Reds!’”²⁶⁰

This perception was so widespread, I argue, that the very ideal of the Association was seen by some to be Communism. When the Community Centre was named, for instance, the term ‘community’ was omitted, leaving the building called merely ‘the Watling Centre’. According to the Yeos this was because the working class rejected the term in view of its middle-class corruption. They quote from the official history of the Association that the term was somewhat out of favour at the time.²⁶¹

Doubtless it was, but, given the high profile of the Communists within the W.A., for precisely the opposite reason than the Yeos suggest. As the *Resident*, for instance, noted:

“It is rather unfortunate that some of the residents of the Watling Estate are under the misapprehension of believing that the Association is run by a certain political body.”²⁶²

And as Ernest Barker indignantly exclaimed in 1938:

“I was told the other day ... that there were many who thought that ‘community’ had some implication of, and some connection with, communism!”²⁶³

Although the Communists may have been vocal on Watling, as I have described in Chapter Four, they were not greatly supported by the majority of Watling’s residents. Their presence in the W.A., therefore, may well have contributed to the lack of support it also received from individual members. Don Ack certainly thought so:

“Whenever a W.A. General Meeting is held, Communists crowd it and dictate the policy, with the result that moderately minded people come away in disgust and thus finish their connection with the W.A.”²⁶⁴

The failure of the Association to encompass the whole population of the estate in its moral community, however, must also be considered in light of the fact that its morally uplifting activities were of little or no appeal to the residents of

²⁶⁰ *The Watling Resident* 6 (1) (May 1933), 1.

²⁶¹ E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, *Watling Community Association*, 26. Quoted in E. & S. Yeo, ‘On the uses of “community”’, 243.

²⁶² *The Watling Resident* 6 (10) (February 1934), 15.

²⁶³ *Community* I (3) (January-February 1938), 85-7.

²⁶⁴ *The Watling Resident* 4 (12) (April 1932), 6-7. Emphasis in the original.

Watling. This was rarely admitted by the W.A., but it is clear that it was the case. A plea for interest in the W.A. Adult School in October 1933, for instance, “met with absolutely no response.”²⁶⁵ Similarly, at a lecture organised in 1934:

“Watling residents had the opportunity of hearing two of the most important L.C.C. Committee Chairmen, but with their usual apathy most people stayed at home.”²⁶⁶

Ron Southwell explained why such morally-laden activities were unpopular:

“Most of my family didn’t want decent pursuits. They wanted pubs, dance halls and cinemas.”²⁶⁷

To the vast majority of residents, therefore, the new moral community of the Watling Association had no meaning. Indeed, for Ted Symmond, the Association and the Centre had no meaning. For him, ‘community amongst the people’ reigned supreme:

“It was completely unnecessary for the estate, there was enough community in your own area. ... There was a community spirit in every street. You know everybody knew everybody, and if there was anything to be done, everybody did it. They all joined in. If you wanted a bit of wood, you went to the man next door. ‘Have you got a bit of wood?’ And in fact, he’d normally cut it up to the size you want.”

Having said this, I do not wish to give the impression that the residents of Watling had no interest at all in the Association or its Centre. They did. It was after all a community centre. The key point, however, is that they saw it as a centre of importance to community through its social activities and the social connections it brought about:

“If you want to be a community, you’ve got to have somewhere to go, to meet. See, so it wasn’t until the Centre was built. ... From there they could have dances. It was a real community centre then, it was very good at, people did get to know each other then.”²⁶⁸

Although the social aims of the Watling Residents’ Association had long since been consumed within the planned moral uplift of the estate by the Watling Association, the spirit of Good Fellowship haunted the New Jerusalem. It had finally got its hall and was using it for its unconstructive social pleasures, passing the dreary winter evenings with a game of dominoes at the Veterans’ Club. (See Figure 6.5).

²⁶⁵ *The Watling Resident* 6 (6) (October 1933), 10.

²⁶⁶ *The Watling Resident* 7 (6) (October 1934), 8.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Mr. Southwell.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Mrs. Ryall.

(iv) Conclusion.

In contrast to Roehampton the Community Association movement were successful in the formation of a Community Association and the provision of a Community Centre on the Watling estate. The Community Association - the Watling Association - did not have its origins in Watling. It was formed under the guidance of the N.E.C.C. and was initially composed mainly of the 'worthies' that lived around the estate. Its aims were quite different from that of the W.R.A. To put it simply, it was a case of the Watling Association's preoccupation with moral community as opposed to the social community of the Residents' Association. After some resistance by the W.R.A., however, it chose to co-operate with the W.A. because it wanted the hall they were offering.

When the two Associations had joined, the former Residents' Association quickly assumed the outer characteristics of a Community Association. Other groups and bodies were affiliated and, after a small delay, a Community Centre was built. The promotion of the model of community according to the N.E.C.C. was pushed. The Community Centre did not so much cater for the plain social needs of the tenants, but rather organised morally worthy activities. Dances and whist drives were marginalised, whilst dramatic productions, lectures, and wholesome exercise were prioritised. Leisure was not to be amusing, rather it was to be work for the tenants - work to develop and improve their mind, body and soul. Also with all the other discourses of community that have been examined, inherent within the moral community of the W.A. was the patriarchal confinement of women to the domestic sphere.

Although the Association had been established, its Centre built, and its activities developed it experienced problems, however. Within it the Communists were working hard to promote their own aims and objectives and to use the Association for their purposes. This had not been a feature of the new community anticipated by the N.E.C.C. There had been no place reserved for revolutionaries in the model of community. Certainly not for ones who taught children to deny the existence of God. This was not a development that the N.E.C.C. appreciated, therefore. Ultimately, the Communists were banished from the Association. This,

however, was not until they had caused permanent damage to the propounding of the moral community of the W.A.

In view of the popular conception of the Association as a Communist body, two significant organisations on the estate had in one case refused to join the W.A. and in the other dissociated themselves from it. Toc H deserted the federation so crucial to the N.E.C.C.'s model of community even though it held a very similar ideal to that of the movement. The O.C.A. refused to affiliate not merely because of the Communists, but also because they disagreed with the morality of the Association. There were other problems too. The Communists had so confused the N.E.C.C. ideal of community that to many residents it was associated with Communism - the W.A. was unable to even name the Centre a 'Community Centre'. Most residents, I argue, turned their backs on the Association.

The Watling Horticultural Society also refused to affiliate. This was one of the most popular organisations on the estate, and it saw no point in affiliating itself to a smaller, less significant body. The residents more generally also failed to demonstrate much support for the particular brand of community that was being offered. This was not necessarily because of the Communists, but because the Association had nothing to offer them. They did not want constructive leisure, they wanted social amusement. The moral community activities of the Association had no meaning for the residents of Watling. Many, it seems, explicitly rejected the N.E.C.C.'s ideal of community in favour of community 'made by the people'. Alternatively, if they attributed any value to the Watling Centre, then it was as social centre - a place for dances and playing dominoes. Even the L.C.C. was having second thoughts about the value of the local Association. The attempted development of a moral community on Watling was a failed enterprise.

E. Conclusion.

In this chapter I have detailed the ideal of community of the Community Association movement. It was, I argue, a moral discourse of community. The roots of this discourse can be found in the ideals of the three organisations that came together to form the N.E.C.C. - the B.A.R.S., the E.S.A., and the N.C.S.S. These

organisations were overwhelmingly concerned with the moral 'improvement' of humanity. In the particular case of the new cottage council estates, these were perceived as a challenge to action - an opportunity to build on virgin territory a new England distinct from the decadent and immoral cities attendant upon urbanisation and industrialization. This was how they envisaged community.

The new community was to be created by Community Associations and Community Centres. These would be established on the estates under the guiding influence of both the national Community Association movement and its local footsoldiers. Their aim was to federate all the groups and individuals on the estate into their umbrella organisation; position 'enlightened' leaders and organisers within the tenants' midst; and then promote morally valued activities. This did not involve unconstructive leisure, but creative leisure, activities that developed the mind, body and soul. These were activities that aimed to improve the residents in all ways. There would be explicit education combined with less explicit education in the form of drama, for instance. There would also be exercise for this developed not just the body, but enabled further development of the mind. If at all possible this exercise - this leisure - should be associated with the countryside. This would enable a return to the enjoyment of the pleasures of the countryside that had been neglected in the amoral cities.

On both Roehampton and Watling, however, the N.E.C.C. model of community experienced difficulties. On Roehampton, it never got past stage one. The Community Association movement, I have argued, became active on the estate when the morality of the R.E.T.A. version of community disappeared. Although the R.E.T.A.'s community had relied upon the social linking of the tenants', it also initially had a moral edge to it - reflected in its promotion of uplifting education and repeated reference to the estate as a Garden Suburb with a village feel. The middle-class tenants who had instituted this social and moral community, however, had left the estate and the morality of the community left with them. The community of the R.E.T.A. became centered around social activities and the use of their bar in Putney Park House.

This is when the Community Association movement first showed an interest in the Roehampton estate. Residents from outside the estate approached the

Community Association movement and the L.C.C. with a view to establishing a Community Association on the estate. Afterwards they approached the R.E.T.A. Initially the R.E.T.A. welcomed their approaches. A new meeting place was considered ideal. When they learnt, however, that there was no place for drinking in the moral community of the Community Association movement they rejected that community. With the L.C.C. allowing the Association to retain a bar within Putney Park House, the R.E.T.A. kept its own meeting place and was in a position to refuse the advances made by the Community Association movement. The imposition of moral community failed on Roehampton. It was not strong enough to displace other versions of community that were more meaningful to the residents.

It also failed on Watling, although it was for different reasons which reflected the local circumstances of the estate. Lacking a hall and envisaging no other opportunity of obtaining one, the Watling Residents' Association did co-operate with the N.E.C.C. A Community Association of federated groups was formed, a Centre built, wise leadership from outside was brought in, and the moral activities of creative leisure were promoted. The planned moral community did not result, however. For a few years, the aims of the Association were subverted by the Communists on the estate for their own ends, and in ways which ran against the N.E.C.C. ideal of moral community. Moreover the Communist activities were to have a longer lasting effect. Their presence in the Watling Association meant that the principle of federation failed as both organisations and residents rejected the Association. They also rejected it either because it did not cater for their interests or because they saw it of no value. Federation failed and support for the Association's moral activities was negligible. Moral community was simply not meaningful to the tenants of Watling. If they did not dismiss the Association and its Centre as unnecessary, then they saw it as important to community only in a social sense. Again, other versions of community were stronger at the local level than the moral version which had been developed as a national movement but which foundered on the 'local circumstances' the N.E.C.C. had not planned for.



Plate 6.1: Brigadier General Sir Wyndham Deedes

THE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS

NEW ESTATES COMMUNITY COMMITTEE



NOTE.—The above grouping is typical. The number and nature of bodies federated in a Community Association vary from place to place.

Figure 6.1: The N.E.C.C. Plan of a Model Community Association
(Source: Voluntary Service: N.C.S.S. Annual Report, 1936-7 p24)

OUR COMMUNITY DIARY**WHAT'S ON THIS MONTH?**

NOTE.—All meetings are held at Watling Centre, Orange Hill Road, except where otherwise announced.
For further details see other pages of *The Resident*.

January, 1934

Activities occurring regularly every week:—

- Sundays.**—Forum, 8.0 p.m.
Mondays.—Woman's Adult School, 2.30 p.m.
 W.E.A. Psychology Class, 8.0 p.m.
 Whist Drive, 8.0 p.m.
 Study Group on Greek Civilisation 8.0 p.m. at 13 Gunter Grove.
 Poor Man's Lawyer, 7.30 p.m.
Tuesdays.—German Class, 6.50 p.m. at 91 Deansbrook Road.
 Club for Girls over 17, 8.0 p.m.
 Economics Class, 8.0 p.m.
 Dance, 8.0 p.m.
 Adult School, 8.15 p.m. at Wesley Hall.
Wednesdays.—Neighbourhood Guild, 2.30 p.m.
 Wireless Group, 8.0 p.m.
 Choral Society, 8.0 p.m.
 Young People's Adult School, 8.0 p.m.
Thursdays.—Whist Drive, 2.30 p.m.
 Dance, 8.0 p.m.
 Watling Guild of Players, 8.0 p.m., enquire at 26 Homefield Road.
Saturdays.—Members' Social, 8.0 p.m.

Sunday, 29.—Forum: Events of the Month: Mr. W. A. L. Raeburn, 8.0 p.m.
 Variety Concert, 8.0 p.m.

Wednesday, 31. — Neighbourhood Guild: Germany, 2.30 p.m.

Friday, 2.—Workers' Social.

* * * * *

Democracy for Children.

Mrs. Dora Russell, wife of Bertrand Russell, the famous philosopher, and herself well-known as an advanced thinker and educationalist, has kindly promised to speak on the above subject to the students of the Tutorial Psychology Class at the Watling Centre on Monday, January 8th at 8 p.m.

In view of the widespread interest which the visit of such a dynamic reformer will arouse, the students issue a cordial invitation to all to come along and hear her views on the upbringing and education of children. These opinions, although they may seem revolutionary, and totally opposed to the generally accepted ones, are, nevertheless, well worth the consideration of all who, either as parents or teachers, have to deal with the problems of training children.

Admission to the meeting will be free, so that none shall be debarred from profiting by this wonderful opportunity. During the evening a collection will be taken to help on the work of the Workers' Educational Association. The London District has now completed twenty-one years' intensive work in organising classes for working men and women in cultural subjects. It has also carried on unremitting propaganda for better educational facilities for all, and this work not only involves much hard work from its members but also some money, which has to be raised by appeals to voluntary support.

Don't forget Monday, January 8th at the Centre at 8 p.m.

Other Activities

- Sunday, 7.**—Forum: The Sterilisation of the Unfit, Miss Hilda Pocock, S.R.N., M.I.H., 8.0 p.m.
Tuesday, 9.—Dressmaking, 2.30 p.m.
 Parents Group, 8.0 p.m. at 13 Gunter Grove.
Wednesday, 10.—Neighbourhood Guild: Public Meeting on Women's Education, 2.30 p.m.
 Public Lecture: Broadcasting, Miss Sprout, 8.0 p.m.
Friday, 12.—Variety Concert, 8.0 p.m.
Sunday, 14th.—Forum: The Administration of a Housing Estate, Mr. Frank Hunt, 8.0 p.m.
Wednesday, 17. — Neighbourhood Guild: Germany, 2.30 p.m.
Thursday, 18th.—Anniversary Fair, 7.30 p.m.
Friday, 19.—Neighbourhood Guild Social, 7.30 p.m.
Sunday, 21.—Forum: What is the State: Mr. Cohen, 8.0 p.m.
 Concert: Violin, 'Cello and singer, 8.0 p.m.
Tuesday, 23.—Women's Physical Training Class, 6.30 p.m.
Wednesday, 24. — Neighbourhood Guild: Germany, 2.30 p.m.
 Public Lecture: Swimming, in co-operation with the Royal Life Saving Society, 8.0 p.m.
Friday, 26.—Members' Social, 8.0 p.m.

FUNERALS AND CREMATIONS

PERSONAL ATTENTION

Stonebridge & Sons

99 High Street, EDGWARE

Phone: Edgware 0210

(By the Memorial)

Plate 6.2: The Watling Association Community Diary
 (Source: The Watling Resident)



Plate 6.3: Townswomen's Guild Float during Watling Week
(Source: Mrs. Y. Ryall)



Plate 6.4: Horticultural Pursuits: Mr. Todd and friend, early 1930s
(Source: Mr. G. Todd)



Plate 6.5: Dominoes at the Veterans' Club
(Source: E. Sewell Harris & P.N. Molloy, Watling Community Association)

CHAPTER SEVEN - CONCLUSION

A. Council Cottages And Community.

Community, I have argued, is a problematic notion. It is surrounded by great conceptual confusion. One enterprising sociologist has managed to discover more than ninety definitions of the term. It is evident that in order to properly explore the development of social life on the inter-war cottage council estates in terms of an examination of community, it is necessary to understand what it means to different people. This has been a key point underlying this thesis. Community needs to be viewed not as a social structure in terms of social organisation and interaction, but as a structure of meaning. True, notions of community can be grounded in forms of social behaviour, but they should not be seen as sociographic fact. The importance of community rests in the ways that it is imagined by people - in the meanings that people attribute to it. With the emphasis on meanings, community needs to be viewed as a discursive structure rather than a social structure. By distinguishing and understanding discourses - meanings - of community, it is possible to further the debate concerning community on the cottage estates.

Adopting this approach, this thesis has shown that the generalization that there was *no* community on the estates needs to be reconsidered. There were at least three different versions of community on Roehampton and Watling. The residents of each estate held their own version of community. The residents' and tenants' associations of each estate held their version. The Community Association movement had its version. These different versions - different discourses - of community were based on different meanings that were attached to community and were grounded in different social relationships.

From the viewpoint of the residents of Watling, the estate was a community in terms of their gregariousness, their public sociability, and their informal networks of mutual aid. They met, talked and partied in the streets and, if someone needed help, then it was close at hand. This was a communal sensibility that was reinforced by the antagonism they experienced from the areas surrounding the estate. They were not a part of Hendon or Mill Hill, they belonged to the community of Watling.

The Roehampton residents also imagined themselves as a part of a community. Community for them meant, first, the friendliness amongst the tenants that arose from living on the same estate and sharing the same small row of shops and the one estate school. Second, they also had a mutual aid ethic giving support and assistance whenever it was needed.

Community had a different meaning for the organisations that some of the tenants formed and participated in - the Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association and the Watling Residents' Association. Community to both these Associations was more formalised than the community of the residents. This version of community had to be created for the residents through organised sociability, and rested on a belief that the residents were unable to form communities on their own. The meaning given to community by the W.R.A. and R.E.T.A., in part at least, was the horizontal integration of the estates' residents by means of the Associations' activities. They would be the source of the residents' friendship, fellowship and comradeship. Yet, in the case of Roehampton, community was given extra meaning by the R.E.T.A. because their activities - social, sporting, gardening, and educational - were aimed at an improved community. The version of community imagined by the R.E.T.A. had respectable and educated tenants living in a charming Garden Suburb and participating in the communal life of their own 'village hall'. This was a new and better way of life compared to the social, physical and moral problems of the inner areas of London they had recently left behind. It was a community based on organised sociability, but it also carried with it a moral message.

For the Community Association movement such morality was the over-riding meaning of community. To them the new estates also presented the opportunity for a new and improved way of life in contrast to the degenerate nature of modern Britain. The Community Association movement believed that the estates had no sense of community to begin with and they aimed to create a community along the 'best possible lines' - a community of improvement and perfect morality. The creation of this model of community was not to be achieved through the social activities the residents had previously enjoyed in the inner areas of London and other cities. The commercialised and mechanical amusements offered there were thought

to be demoralising - they were seen as inhibiting community. In their place the Community Association would create moral community by providing constructive leisure time activities. Education would improve the tenants mentally. Exercise would improve the tenants physically and mentally, particularly if it was exercise involving the neglected pleasures of rural Britain. Social activity was marginalised in this meaning of community. There was no place for mere amusement, only work to improve and 'uplift' the tenants who had previously been swamped by the evils of urbanisation and industrialisation.

While these discourses of community can be discussed separately it can also be seen that they overlapped to a certain extent. This is not surprising. Some of the tenants, for instance, were involved in the tenants' or residents' associations, and also in the Community Associations. Also the R.E.T.A. and the Community Association movement clearly shared some common ground. These discourses, however, can in places be loosely tied down to certain groups of people. I have shown how the meanings attached to community by the residents reflected each estate's social structure. In addition, the Executive of the W.R.A. appears to have been composed largely of working-class men who had a feel for public life. Several of the founders progressed into borough politics as representatives of the Labour Party. The R.E.T.A., on the other hand, had been formed by the carefully selected first tenants on the estate. These were the tenants the Council would later ask to leave the estate because they did not need subsidised housing. These tenants could be caricatured as middle-class and, according to their Treasurer and their journal, they described themselves as middle-class. For the Community Association movement, below the level of the N.E.C.C., it was mainly local dignitaries and benefactors, especially members of the clergy.

Although these are the broad groups that these discourses of community appealed to, there was one group on both estates that they attempted to appeal to in particularly narrow ways. This was the women of Roehampton and Watling. Inherent within the residents' discourses of community, the mutual aid ethic carried with it the notion that domestic tasks were women's tasks. This was reflected in the other discourses. Female participation in the activities of the W.R.A., the R.E.T.A.

and the Community Association on Watling was restricted at all levels. Female involvement in the public sphere was not on an equivalent level to male involvement. When the Associations did cater for what they assumed were female interests, these interests were intimately associated with the private sphere - providing refreshments, detailing recipes, forming sewing circles, and showing how to embroider. Whatever the meaning given to community, a woman's place in that community was in the home.

Other work which discusses the meaning given to community on the new estates is, I have argued, generalised if not misleading. A middle-class version of community promoted by the Community Association movement was depicted as attempting to displace a working-class version of the residents. This was a depiction that needed to be questioned on two accounts. First, not all the residents were working-class and, second, 'the working class' is not monolithic and homogenous, but is fractured by many cleavages and divisions. Class, I have argued, is place-specific and also mediated by politics and culture. A central feature within the examination of the discourses of community on the new estates, therefore, was the emphasis given to the need to ground them in the particular contexts of each estate.

In one respect, this has shown that the history of the idea of community on these estates cannot be reduced to the imposition of *one* version of community by *one* class upon another. The events upon the cottage estates were more complicated than that because in addition to the discourse of community of the Community Association movement there were, as I have shown, the discourses of the residents and their Associations.

The Watling estate was at the forefront of the Community Association movement's campaign to create the New Jerusalem - the Centre there was seen as an experiment in creating moral community. For the vast majority of the residents who saw themselves as part of an informal community based upon public sociability and mutuality, however, the ideal of community represented by the Watling Association and its Centre was just not meaningful. The Association and its Centre only ever achieved very low levels of membership. These were almost negligible in

comparison to the estate's total population and small compared to those of the three important organisations on the estate that the Association failed to federate.

Moreover, the Association's promotion of educational and moralising activities did not appeal. The Watling Association's attempts at moral uplift expressed in terms of community was so unsuccessful that the Community Centre on the estate could not even be called the Community Centre. If there was any support given to the Association it was not for their ideal of a moral community but as a social meeting place. It was a place for dances and games of dominoes. Even the L.C.C. questioned the worth of the Watling Association. As far as the Council was concerned it was an irritating thorn in its side.

The R.E.T.A. and its members similarly rejected the ideal of moral community in the years approaching World War II. They were initially receptive to the approaches of the Community Association movement in view of its promises of a centre with more accommodation than Putney Park House, but when it became apparent that they could not drink there they too rejected the morality of the centre and proposed Association. True, there was still an element of 'uplift' in the R.E.T.A.'s activities - physical fitness and juvenile film shows - borrowed from the Community Association movement to convince the London County Council of their worth, but by that time their community was a community based on sociability and that was how they wanted to keep it. On both Roehampton and Watling the attempted imposition of the moral community was a failed enterprise.

The grounding of the discourses of community in the particular contexts of Roehampton and Watling also requires, however, that these broad conclusions be qualified in the light of the differences between Roehampton and Watling. The elements of each discourse of community and the relationships between them were refracted through the social compositions of each estate.

Chapter Four has shown how the discourses of community of the estates' residents were shaped by the implications of the class compositions of the estates. In one respect community on Roehampton was more reserved than that of Watling. Public sociability and gregariousness did not enter into the Roehampton residents' discourse of community. Precisely the opposite, in fact, for there was a focus upon

the home, the family, and privacy. Such a culture was a reflection of the lower middle-class values of respectability that permeated the estate. At the same time, the residents of Roehampton's feeling of belonging to a community was less sensitised than their counterparts on Watling because they experienced very little antagonism from the surrounding areas. Containing respectable citizens - some with their own domestic servants - the estate could only be positively imagined by those who lived around it. Certainly it could be imagined more positively than Watling. The antagonism the residents on Watling received - antagonism that heightened their communal sensibility - stemmed from the imagining of them as uncivilised revolutionaries, an imagining which in turn stemmed from the residents more working-class nature and, in a minority of cases, extremist working-class politics.

In Chapter Five it has also been shown that the class structure of each estate impinged upon the discourses of community of the R.E.T.A. and the W.R.A. Whereas the community of the W.R.A. was based solely on creating social bonds between the tenants, the community of the R.E.T.A., for its first ten years, had the added elements of improvement, morality and respectability. For the middle-class R.E.T.A. community was not just about friendliness and fellowship - social integration - but about an improved and new way of life compared to the one they had left behind. Their community centred around life in a charming Garden Suburb with its 'village sports' and 'village fêtes.' It was a community that was different socially, physically and morally from the decadent and teeming metropolis and it was rooted in nostalgic views of a green and pleasant England. Such lofty ideals were never apparent in the community of the W.R.A. Instead there were Communists agitating for rent reductions and aid for the poor.

Chapter Six has shown how there was a particular moral version of community proposed by the Community Association movement. Although the Community Association movement was a national body, its ideal of community was designed to be implemented in different localities to change and rejuvenate those localities. The enterprise, however, failed. In Roehampton, the moral community of the Community Association movement was faced by the social community of the R.E.T.A. This was a social community that was more meaningful to the Association

than the morality of the Community Association movement. The R.E.T.A. rejected the Community Association's moral discourse. In Watling, on the other hand, the moral community came up against both the Communists and the ways in which it was meaningless to others who wanted to belong to less formal and less overtly moralised organisations. In both cases other versions of community were more meaningful than the moral version promoted by the Community Association movement.

B. Wider Contribution.

The history of inter-war London is, Pat Garside tells us, largely unwritten. Contemporary accounts provide a wealth of detail on London's physical, economic and social fabric, yet the necessary synthesis is lacking. Housing is one exception to this, but there are still only a very few intensive studies of social life.¹ This thesis has made a contribution to these neglected areas by analysing the development of social life upon the inter-war cottage council estates. These merited attention not least because they were such a novel physical and social feature of the urban landscape. Suburbanisation, a process previously reserved for the middle classes, was now available to the working class. The form it took was permeated with notions of a new way of life. Analysis of the estates in terms of community was pertinent given the prevalence of the ideal within both the hopes for a new way of life that the council cottages embodied and contemporary and historical assessment of how the new way of life developed. This specific focus upon community has proved especially fruitful in two ways. It has suggested an alternative perspective to traditional and stereotyped views of life upon the estates and has, in doing so, hinted at wider issues to consider when conceptualising social meanings and discourse in historical research.

Firstly, the conventional wisdom that the cottage estates were lacking in community has been questioned by its failure to appreciate the different meanings of community. Durant's view that the Watling estate lacked community was one of

¹ P.L. Garside, 'London and the home counties', in F.M.L. Thompson (Ed), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950. Volume 1, Regions and Communities*, 526.

the earliest social commentaries about life on the new estates and an example for others to follow. Together with other works it has helped to construct one of our most powerful narratives of working-class suburban living - the apocryphal narrative of the loneliness and desolation of the suburban estate.² In dealing with her conclusions it is important to understand that the context of her study positioned it within the discourse of community of the Community Association movement. She notes that "E. Sewell Harris of the Watling Association assisted me generously for several months." Her survey was sponsored in part by the London Council of Social Service.³ They appear to have provided not mere sponsorship of the survey, however, but the prevailing ethos of it:

"It will be shown why the question of community centres is so important ... i.e. it will be demonstrated that social facilities on the new housing estates can be a very marked contribution to civic life, that they are not merely preventative institutions, established in order to avoid mischief, but that they can positively help to produce better citizens and better communities which might be an example to others.

The results of the investigation should serve as a basis for future discussion on the question of housing estates and on related questions of social work, concerning the spending of leisure.

...

For such a demonstration the new housing estates furnish an example par excellence. ... they illustrate what potentialities of social and individual life might be fostered."⁴

That her study was guided so closely by the ideals of the Community Association movement needs to be borne in mind, I suggest, when her arguments and conclusions are considered. Alternatively, perhaps Sewell Harris had clouded her judgement when she wrote:

"In London's inner boroughs clubs have been established for the people; the Community Centre at Watling was planned and is run by the people themselves. Thus an exceptional institution has been created, free from patronage."⁵

² V. Lebeau, 'The worst of all possible worlds?', in R. Silverstone (Ed), *Visions of Suburbia*, 291.

³ 'Author's Foreword', in R. Durant, *Watling*, vii.

⁴ Draft of an Investigation into the Social Life of New Municipal Housing Estates. Prepared by Mrs. Ruth Durant. G.L.R.O. file ACC 1888 85.

⁵ R. Durant, *Watling*, 117.

I am not suggesting that all accounts of community on the cottage estates were written from this position. The point I stress is that they fail to take account of not only the richness and variety of working-class life on the estates, but also the variety of meanings community can represent.⁶ This thesis suggests that historians of inter-war London should be wary of accepting an overly simplified class analysis of these estates and, by extension, the city as a whole.

Secondly, the grounding of these discourses of community and their histories in the specific circumstances of each estate has shown how the meanings attached to community were place-dependent. By looking closely at Roehampton and Watling, and at the similarities and differences between them, I have shown that the understandings of community need to be interpreted in relation to the characteristics of those places - their occupational and neighbourhood structures, their cultures and their politics - as well as in relation to the ways in which they were seen by outsiders like the suburbanites of Hendon and the reformers of the N.C.S.S. It is only by detailing the social compositions of the estates, the types of relationships that were formed there, the organisations that were developed, and their relations to other bodies that the discourses of community can be grounded. While we cannot use the term 'community' to describe social relations in place, we do need to investigate those social relations, and those places, to understand what community means.

The manner in which the attempted imposition of a middle-class discourse of community upon the estates' residents proved unsuccessful is also of particular interest. This thesis anticipated that there would be a plethora of meanings of community, it was also assumed however that the concept would be contested – a theme that was reflected in this work's original title. It was expected that any failure on behalf of a dominant class or group to impose their discourse of community would be attributable to explicit resistances and contestation over the meaning of the concept. In the domain of cultural politics it was assumed that meanings of community would be negotiated and contested according to the interests of those involved. Community in my assessment, however, was not a concept that was explicitly contested. Although the Community Association movement forcefully

⁶ J.E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1979* (London, 1984), 82.

promoted its ideal of community, there were few explicit conflicts over the meaning of community on the estates. With the exception of the Communists on Watling, who attempted to subvert the ideal of moral community to their own ends, what happened is perhaps better characterised as a rejection of the ideal that was preached by the Community Association and embodied within its Community Centres. Rather than contesting the concept, the residents chose simply not to support it.

Overall, therefore, this thesis has attempted to rewrite the histories of 'community' on the inter-war cottage council estates of Roehampton and Watling and has indicated issues to further consider when conceptualising and investigating social meanings and discourses in historical research. By understanding 'community' as a structure of meaning rather than a social structure, and by trying to identify different 'discourses of community', I have questioned the idea that there was *no* community and the idea that a middle-class version of community was imposed on the working-class residents. Instead, I have shown that there were different, albeit overlapping, discourses of community that were used in and around the estates. In short, there were a plurality of meanings attached to community. It has been highlighted that such meanings and discourses have geographies and histories. Geographies and histories that are not necessarily simply characterised in terms of contestation and resistance, but which can be understood in terms of the everyday, and often mundane, ways in which social relations and meanings are created and lived out.

C. What Are They Like Now?

In some respects Roehampton and Watling today are not so different from sixty years ago. The Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association continues to provide entertainment for the residents, especially if they happen to like drinking. True, the Community Association movement's desire to knock down Putney Park House was almost achieved with the help of a Luftwaffe bomb, but then it was always going to take something special to close the billiard room. The Watling Centre also still stands. The banner attached to its exterior in March 1998 proudly proclaims 'Activities for All Ages'. Burnt Oak Pensioners' Voice are now the hall's main

users. Bingo has replaced whist drives as the main attraction. Variations on a continuing theme.

Time, however, has not stood still and the estates have changed. On Watling, some changes could perhaps have been cheerfully predicted by the estate's detractors of yesterday. By the 1960s youths who had previously congregated outside the Watling Centre had moved on. They were menacing the whole estate instead. Roaming the streets in gangs they were bent on destruction and on terrorising peaceful residents.⁷ By the 1990s they had progressed to dealing drugs on the banks of the Silkstream.⁸ But Roehampton has suffered too. Wimbledon Common is no longer perceived as the safe retreat from the metropolis that it once was.

Although original families do remain, there have been newcomers to both estates in the post-war years. On Watling, the new residents were, initially at least, much like the previous ones – a mixture of white working people from London. Black residents did arrive later, however, to deflect some of the attention from their Jewish predecessors. More recently, houses have been bought by their tenants and then sold. The new residents appear not to be communist agitators, and Little Moscow is a distant memory. Roehampton's history has followed a slightly different course. In the 1950s and 1960s 'less respectable' tenants were moved into particular parts of the estate. Other areas were 'preserved'. However, Wandsworth Borough Council's vigorous promotion of the 'Right to Buy' has ensured a wider degree of (re)gentrification in latter years.

These newest residents on both estates have remained strangers to the original tenants. I was told that they all keep themselves to themselves. From this perspective 'community amongst the people' has declined. But at least the notion still survives. The other discourses of community have proved less resilient. The Roehampton Estate Tenants' Association speaks the language of drink not community. It has done so for many years. The Watling Community Association no longer exists. Its place has been taken by such bodies as the Watling Tenants'

⁷ *Hendon and Finchley Times and Guardian*, 5.2.60., 8.

⁸ Interview with Mrs. Haigh.

and Residents' Association, formed in 1959. They still meet at the Watling Centre which, according to the residents and as its name implies, is not a community centre.

APPENDIX ONE - LIST OF INTERVIEWEES.

A. Roehampton.

1. Norman Barnes: Former Treasurer of the R.E.T.A. Moved to the estate in the mid-1920s. Worked mainly in the aircraft design industry.

2. Peggy Sturman: A resident of Putney.

3. Ivy Woollett: Moved to the estate in the early 1920s. Father had been a motor coach builder, sometimes suffering unemployment.

4. Dorothy Slaughter: Moved to the estate at the beginning of World War II. Worked part-time in a limb-fitting centre.

5. Molly Snell and Bill Pratt: Bill moved to the estate in 1921, Molly in 1922. Molly's father had made his living playing in a band. Bill was a plumber on the estate.

6. Margaret Newman: A former teacher who had moved to the estate in the early 1920s.

7. Frank S. Hibbert: Moved to the estate in 1935. His father was a commercial artist in Fleet Street. No longer lived on the estate.

8. Peter Pearson: Moved to the estate in the early 1920s. He had been an electrical engineer.

9. Margaret Murphy: A civil servant, she had moved to the estate in 1932. No longer lived on the estate.

10. Nora Morrell: Father was a civil servant. Moved to the estate in the mid-1920s.

11. Leslie Parsons: Moved to the estate in 1925. Had worked in market research.

12. Audrey Power: Father was an accountant. Had moved to the estate in 1922.

13. Miss K. Connelly: Moved to the estate in 1932. Her father was a senior probation officer. No longer lived on the estate.

B. Watling.

14. Hilda (& Arthur) Goodman: Moved to the estate in 1927. Hilda's parents had run a pub inherited from her grandfather. Arthur didn't say much.

15. Ron Southwell: Had not lived on the estate during the inter-war period, but gave informed and interesting opinions of the experiences of his parents.

16. George Todd: Moved to the estate in the early 1930s. His father was a disabled soldier.

17. Violet Bunyan: Worked as an apprentice in the printing trade. Had moved to the estate in the late 1930s.

18. Yvonne Ryall: Moved to the estate in the 1928. She was a dressmaker.

19. Kerry Alford: A resident just off the estate.
20. Ronald Payne: A former L.C.C. clerk on the estate. Started work there in 1930.
21. Leslie Wisdan: Moved to the estate in 1928. His father had been a labourer. No longer living on the estate.
22. Mrs. W.M. Haigh: Moved to the estate in the mid-1920s. Father worked on the railway.
23. Mr. R. Barker and Mr. Ted Symmond: Mr. Barker moved to the estate in 1927. His father was a 'navvy'. Mr. Symmond moved to the estate in 1935. He had worked in an aircraft factory.
24. Fiona Lewinton: Moved to the estate in 1927. Her father ran the Watling United Sports Club. He was a telephone engineer.
25. Elizabeth Knight: Moved to the estate in 1931. A first generation tenant. Her husband worked on the buses.
26. Elizabeth Lewington: Moved to the estate at the end of the 1920s. Another original tenant. She had been a member of the Communist Party. Her husband worked as a driver.



Plate 1 Appendix 1: George Todd, early 1930s
(Source: Mr. G. Todd)

APPENDIX TWO: OCCUPATIONAL DATA

Occupations of Head of Families in January 1930, as stated by tenants

Source: L.C.C., *Housing Estates: Statistics for the year 1929-30*

(London, 1930), 18-9.

WHITE COLLAR	Roehampton	Percentage	Watling	Percentage
Accountant	8	0.64	6	0.15
Agent	10	0.81	16	0.39
Artist	1	0.08	1	0.02
Chemist, etc.	2	0.16	6	0.15
Civil Servant	42	3.38	98	2.37
Clergyman, Church worker	0	0.00	1	0.02
Clerk, etc.	225	18.12	265	6.41
Commercial traveller	23	1.85	20	0.48
Dentist	0	0.00	5	0.12
Draughtsman, designer	4	0.32	8	0.19
Doctor	0	0.00	0	0.00
General Dealer	3	0.24	2	0.05
Journalist	3	0.24	2	0.05
Manager, manageress	24	1.93	36	0.87
Municipal or Poor Law Official	14	1.13	19	0.46
Musician, artiste	2	0.16	4	0.10
Newsagent	4	0.32	9	0.22
Nurse, midwife	1	0.08	3	0.07
Optician	0	0.00	3	0.07
Photographer, etc	1	0.08	7	0.17
Police service	23	1.85	49	1.19
Salesman, saleswoman	19	1.53	53	1.28
Superintendent, caretaker	5	0.40	12	0.29
Teacher	23	1.85	5	0.12
Telephone operator, telegraphist	13	1.05	10	0.24
Typist	2	0.16	1	0.02
Wireless operator	0	0.00	1	0.02

SKILLED	Roehampton	Percentage	Watling	Percentage
Baker and Confectioner	4	0.32	25	0.60
Basket maker	0	0.00	3	0.07
Blacksmith, Farrier	0	0.00	6	0.15
Boilermaker	1	0.08	7	0.17
Bookbinder, Folder	1	0.08	22	0.53
Bootmaker and Repairer	7	0.56	29	0.70
Brass Finisher and Moulder	1	0.08	6	0.15
Bricklayer, etc.	2	0.16	34	0.82
Builder	3	0.24	11	0.27
Butcher	2	0.16	14	0.34
Cabinet Maker	2	0.16	10	0.24
Cable Maker	0	0.00	2	0.05
Carman, etc.	0	0.00	41	0.99
Carpenter, Joiner	21	1.69	108	2.61
Carpet Planner	2	0.16	4	0.10
Case, Bag and Portmanteau Maker	0	0.00	5	0.12
Caterer	1	0.08	6	0.15
Coach and Motor Builder	19	1.53	51	1.23
Compositor, printer, etc.	30	2.42	102	2.47
Conductor	28	2.25	132	3.19
Cooper	2	0.16	0	0.00
Dressmaker	1	0.08	3	0.07
Electrician	16	1.29	80	1.93
Electro Plater	0	0.00	4	0.10
Engine Driver	2	0.16	16	0.39
Engineer	32	2.58	79	1.91
Engraver	1	0.08	7	0.17
Fireman	12	0.97	47	1.14
Fishmonger	1	0.08	8	0.19
Fitter, plumber, etc.	10	0.81	117	2.83
Foreman, forewoman	24	1.93	38	0.92
Furrier	1	0.08	5	0.12
Gardener, Park-keeper	6	0.48	25	0.60
Glazier, Glass Worker	1	0.08	10	0.24
Goldsmith, Silversmith	0	0.00	6	0.15
Greengrocer, grocer	4	0.32	17	0.41
Harddresser	1	0.08	6	0.15
Hat and cap Maker	0	0.00	1	0.02
Inspector	15	1.21	19	0.46
Instrument and Tool Maker	3	0.24	21	0.51
Jeweller	5	0.40	4	0.10
Leather worker	3	0.24	12	0.29
Lithographers	1	0.08	4	0.10
Mechanic	12	0.97	80	1.93
Metal worker	5	0.40	42	1.02
Moulder	1	0.08	2	0.05
Musical Instrument maker or Tuner	1	0.08	24	0.58
Omnibus driver	0	0.00	0	0.00
Painter, decorator	19	1.53	137	3.31

Cont.d	Plasterer	4	0.32	16	0.39
	Polisher (French, etc)	2	0.16	37	0.89
	Post Office worker	56	4.51	230	5.56
	Railway worker	15	1.21	276	6.67
	Ship's rigger	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Signwriter	1	0.08	8	0.19
	Stevedore	0	0.00	1	0.02
	Stonemason	3	0.24	3	0.07
	Tailor, tailoress	5	0.40	19	0.46
	Theatre, etc., worker	0	0.00	3	0.07
	Timekeeper	1	0.08	9	0.22
	Tinsmith, Tinsplate Worker	0	0.00	6	0.15
	Tramworker	16	1.29	21	0.51
	Transport worker	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Umbrella and stick maker	2	0.16	0	0.00
	Upholsterer, upholsteress	3	0.24	23	0.56
	Wheelwright	0	0.00	2	0.05
	Woodworker	2	0.16	40	0.97

UNSKILLED	Roehampton	Percentage	Watling	Percentage
Asphalte Worker	0	0.00	2	0.05
Assistant (shop etc.)	12	0.97	50	1.21
Attendant	6	0.48	32	0.77
Barman, Barmaid	0	0.00	2	0.05
Butler, Valet	3	0.24	1	0.02
Cellarman	0	0.00	1	0.02
Charwoman, Cleaner, etc.	0	0.00	27	0.65
Checker	0	0.00	8	0.19
Cigar and Cigarette Maker	1	0.08	2	0.05
Collector	5	0.40	10	0.24
Commissionaire	2	0.16	21	0.51
Cook	2	0.16	25	0.60
Costermonger	0	0.00	2	0.05
Cutter	6	0.48	7	0.17
Domestic or Hotel servant	6	0.48	18	0.44
Driver	0	0.00	13	0.31
Dustman	0	0.00	13	0.31
Factory hand	0	0.00	7	0.17
Garage Worker	1	0.08	11	0.27
Gas worker	3	0.24	24	0.58
Horsekeeper	1	0.08	4	0.10
Housekeeper and Housewife	8	0.64	40	0.97
Labourer	17	1.37	172	4.16
Laundry worker	2	0.16	4	0.10
Machinist, machine minder	4	0.32	28	0.68
Messenger	7	0.56	30	0.73
Milkman, dairyman	4	0.32	13	0.31
Motor driver	80	6.44	282	6.82
Packer	5	0.40	58	1.40
Porter, portress	2	0.16	80	1.93
Seaman, steward	1	0.08	7	0.17
Stoker	4	0.32	18	0.44
Storekeeper	12	0.97	48	1.16
Waiter, waitress	2	0.16	12	0.29
Warehouseman	10	0.81	87	2.10
Watchman	5	0.40	6	0.15
Waterman, boatman, etc	1	0.08	2	0.05
Window cleaner	5	0.40	20	0.48

MISCELLANEOUS	Roehampton	Percentage	Watling	Percentage
Army and Navy	4	0.32	2	0.05
Pensioner	45	3.62	78	1.89
Widow	46	3.70	31	0.75
Miscellaneous	63	5.07	63	1.52
No occupation	2	0.16	6	0.15

Occupations of Head of Families in January 1939, as stated by tenants
Source: L.C.C., *Housing Estates: Statistics for the year 1938-39*
(London, 1939), 57-8.

WHITE COLLAR	Roehampton	Percentage	Watling	Percentage
Accountant	0	0	0	0
Agent	5	0.41	7	0.17
Artist	3	0.25	0	0.00
Chemist, etc.	4	0.33	7	0.17
Civil Servant	41	3.38	36	0.89
Clergyman, Church worker	2	0.17	1	0.02
Clerk, etc.	100	8.25	142	3.52
Commercial traveller	9	0.74	5	0.12
Dentist	0	0.00	2	0.05
Draughtsman, designer	1	0.08	3	0.07
Doctor	0	0.00	0	0.00
General Dealer	0	0.00	2	0.05
Journalist	0	0.00	0	0.00
Manager, manageress	8	0.66	14	0.35
Municipal employee	16	1.32	27	0.67
Musician, artiste	2	0.17	3	0.07
Newsagent and vendor	2	0.17	12	0.30
Nurse, midwife	6	0.50	3	0.07
Optician	1	0.08	10	0.25
Photographer, etc	0	0.00	1	0.02
Police service	15	1.24	22	0.55
Salesman, saleswoman	22	1.82	35	0.87
Shopkeeper	2	0.17	3	0.07
Superintendent	2	0.17	4	0.10
Teacher	5	0.41	2	0.05
Telephone operator, telegraphist	9	0.74	10	0.25
Tobacconist	1	0.08	2	0.05
Typist	0	0.00	0	0.00
Wireless operator	0	0.00	0	0.00

SKILLED	Roehampton	Percentage	Watling	Percentage
Blacksmith, Farrier	0	0	2	0.05
Baker and Confectioner	11	0.91	16	0.40
Basket maker	0	0.00	0	0.00
Boilermaker	2	0.16	2	0.05
Bookbinder, Folder	3	0.25	13	0.32
Bootmaker and Repairer	5	0.41	19	0.47
Brass Finisher and Moulder	2	0.16	1	0.02
Bricklayer, etc.	4	0.33	46	1.14
Builder	3	0.25	0	0.00
Butcher	8	0.66	7	0.17
Cabinet Maker	1	0.08	12	0.30
Cable Maker	2	0.16	0	0.00
Carman, etc.	1	0.08	16	0.40
Carpenter, Joiner	18	1.48	114	2.83
Carpet Planner	3	0.25	3	0.07
Case, Bag and Portmanteau Maker	0	0.00	0	0.00
Caterer	2	0.16	2	0.05
Coach and Motor Builder	13	1.07	27	0.67
Compositor, printer, etc.	26	2.14	82	2.03
Conductor	0	0.00	5	0.12
Cooper	0	0.00	2	0.05
Draper	1	0.08	0	0.00
Dressmaker	2	0.16	1	0.02
Electrician	23	1.90	72	1.79
Electro Plater	0	0.00	7	0.17
Engine Driver	5	0.41	6	0.15
Engineer	30	2.47	72	1.79
Engraver	1	0.08	4	0.10
Fireman	29	2.39	43	1.07
Fishmonger	0	0.00	5	0.12
Fitter, plumber, etc.	25	2.06	116	2.88
Florist, fruiterer	0	0.00	5	0.12
Foreman, forewoman	14	1.15	41	1.02
Furrier	0	0.00	6	0.15
Gardener, Park-keeper	16	1.32	29	0.72
Glazier, Glass Worker	1	0.08	5	0.12
Goldsmith, Silversmith	0	0.00	1	0.02
Greengrocer, grocer	2	0.16	5	0.12
Hairdresser	2	0.16	6	0.15
Hat and cap Maker	0	0.00	0	0.00
Inspector	12	0.99	7	0.17
Instrument and Tool Maker	4	0.33	9	0.22
Jeweller	1	0.08	7	0.17
Leather worker	7	0.58	9	0.22
Lithographers	0	0.00	0	0.00
Mechanic	23	1.90	55	1.36
Metal worker	8	0.66	57	1.41
Moulder	1	0.08	0	0.00
Musical Instrument maker or Tuner	0	0.00	5	0.12

Cont.d	Omnibus conductor	36	2.97	86	2.13
	Omnibus driver	41	3.38	66	1.64
	Painter, decorator	33	2.72	174	4.32
	Plasterer	2	0.16	16	0.40
	Polisher (French, etc)	2	0.16	39	0.97
	Post Office worker	55	4.53	204	5.06
	Process Engaver	2	0.16	5	0.12
	Railway worker	12	0.99	228	5.66
	Sawyer	1	0.08	1	0.02
	Ship's rigger	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Shipwright	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Signwriter	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Stevedore	0	0.00	1	0.02
	Stonemason	2	0.16	3	0.07
	Tailor, tailoress	5	0.41	22	0.55
	Theatre, etc., worker	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Tiler	2	0.16	3	0.07
	Timekeeper	0	0.00	5	0.12
	Tinsmith, Tinplate Worker	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Tramworker	1	0.08	0	0.00
	Transport worker	21	1.73	79	1.96
	Umbrella and stick maker	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Upholsterer, upholsteress	4	0.33	21	0.52
	Watch and Clock Repairer	1	0.08	3	0.07
	Wheelwright	0	0.00	4	0.10
	Woodworker	2	0.16	22	0.55

UNSKILLED	Roehampton	Percentage	Watling	Percentage
Asphalte Worker	1	0.08	3	0.07
Assistant (shop etc.)	6	0.49	30	0.74
Attendant	13	1.07	36	0.89
Barman, Barmaid	0	0.00	0	0.00
Box and case maker	0	0.00	3	0.07
Butler, Valet	1	0.08	0	0.00
Caretaker	0	0.00	7	0.17
Cellarman	0	0.00	4	0.10
Charwoman, Cleaner, etc.	4	0.33	33	0.82
Checker	4	0.33	18	0.45
Cigar and Cigarette Maker	1	0.08	0	0.00
Cinema Worker	2	0.16	0	0.00
Collector	1	0.08	5	0.12
Commissionaire	3	0.25	9	0.22
Cook	8	0.66	24	0.60
Costermonger	0	0.00	0	0.00
Cutter	0	0.00	5	0.12
Domestic or Hotel servant	7	0.58	2	0.05
Driver	41	3.38	10	0.25
Dustman	0	0.00	0	0.00
Factory hand	2	0.16	3	0.07
Furnace and Foundry workers	1	0.08	2	0.05
Garage Worker	4	0.33	14	0.35
Gas worker	12	0.99	29	0.72
Horsekeeper	0	0.00	2	0.05
Housekeeper and Housewife	42	3.46	53	1.32
Labourer	31	2.56	303	7.52
Laundry worker	2	0.16	5	0.12
Machinist, machine minder	7	0.58	37	0.92
Messenger	11	0.91	18	0.45
Milkman, dairymen	6	0.49	22	0.55
Motor driver	31	2.56	230	5.71
Packer	6	0.49	61	1.51
Porter, portress	11	0.91	79	1.96
Seaman, steward	2	0.16	1	0.02
Scaffolder	0	0.00	6	0.15
Stoker	5	0.41	23	0.57
Storekeeper	17	1.40	49	1.22
Street trader	0	0.00	3	0.07
Waiter, waitress	2	0.16	10	0.25
Warehouseman	14	1.15	94	2.33
Watchman	3	0.25	12	0.30
Waterman, boatman, etc	2	0.16	2	0.05
Window cleaner	3	0.25	17	0.42

MISCELLANEOUS	Roehampton	Percentage	Watling	Percentage
Army, Navy and Air Force	0	0.00	4	0.10
Pensioner	61	5.03	179	4.44
Widow	25	2.06	113	2.80
Miscellaneous	19	1.57	163	4.04
No occupation	13	1.07	30	0.74

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